

MAY 5, 2003

Susan Sontag on Courage and Resistance

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LETTERS



D. J. B. FISHMAN

KUCINICH ON CHOICE

Washington, DC

■ In Katha Pollitt's April 21 "Subject to Debate," she mentioned that my vote on the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act will be watched. Considering that I've given this issue much thought over the past couple of years, I hope she will be watching as I oppose the bill when it reaches the House. When the Supreme Court struck down a similar "partial-birth" abortion ban in *Stenberg v. Carhart*, it affirmed what was said in *Roe v. Wade*: A woman's health must be preserved. I believe in upholding the right to choose and will oppose legislation, like the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act, that restricts the rights guaranteed in *Roe*.

DENNIS J. KUCINICH
Member of Congress

10th Congressional District, Ohio

CLUCK CLUCK CLUCK

Lincoln, Neb.

■ I wish Calvin Trillin had used the more familiar "chicken hawk" rather than "sissy hawk" in his April 14 poem on Richard Perle. "Chicken hawk" fits the meter and lacks the whiff of latent homophobia that is surprising coming from the author of the moving and memorable *Remembering Denny*.

PAUL SCOTT STANFIELD

TRILLIN REPLIES

New York City

■ I thank Paul Stanfield for his thoughtful suggestion, but I had consciously decided against "chicken hawk." It actually means a hawk that preys on chickens rather than a chicken that acts like a hawk, and its second meaning (in the American Heritage dictionary, 4th edition) is "a man who seeks out boys or young men as his sexual partners." Also, I'm not ready to give up on "sissy" as meaning (to quote the same dictionary) "a person regarded as timid or cowardly." The other definition is "a boy or man regarded as effeminate," but I don't see that it's doing anybody any favors to equate effeminacy with homosexuality. It seems to me that someone who urges others on to fight wars he is unwilling to fight himself—which is what the members of the Sissy Hawk Brigade did during the Vietnam War—is properly called a sissy, even if, as in the case of Dick Cheney, he played high school football.

CALVIN TRILLIN

SEND BOOMERS TO OKEFENOKEE

Seattle

■ Although I agree with the conclusions reached by Jonathan Schell in "American Tragedy" [April 7], I suggest a different interpretation of what brought us to this point. It is all too easy to see this as a usurpation of power and lay it at the

feet of the Republicans and the "American military machine," but I believe the root cause came more in the form of an incremental abdication by the generation that seemed to hold so much promise in the sixties, my generation, the baby boomers. They have become the most powerful generation that has ever existed, and like so many before them, as they gained economically they became obsessed with the preservation of their wealth and the self-indulgent lifestyle it provided. Ideals were swapped for SUVs, social concerns for stock portfolios and Botox injections—fueled by cheap energy and damn the consequences.

It was all too easy to allow Clinton, Lieberman and the rest to consciously (and publicly) move the Democratic Party to the right, disguising Old Republicanism as New Democrats, all too easy to sit back and salve their consciences by relabeling their greed. So now we all pay the price. A good look in the mirror is in order. To quote a rather wise possum, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

JOHN OLCESE

THAT LIBERAL MEDIA

Melrose Park, Pa.

■ Eric Alterman ["What Liberal Media?" Feb. 24] and others at *The Nation* strongly reinforce the idea that the media—owned more and more by corporations and conglomerates—vigorously promote a conservative philosophy. Considerable evidence exists for this idea. But the theory works only with the aid of selective perception—i.e., use every confirmation to strengthen your belief and screen out every instance that contradicts it. In reality, every week, every day, the media provide cogent criticism of our government and our corporations.

The following public figures who opposed war on Iraq without UN approval have appeared on major talk shows or have written op-eds in major dailies: Ted Kennedy, Howard Dean (a full hour on *Meet the Press*), Dennis Kucinich, Dale Bumpers, Anthony Zinni, Wesley Clark, Norman Schwarzkopf, Scott Ritter, President Carter, Brent Scowcroft, Zbigniew Brzezinski, George Mitchell, President Clinton, Madeleine Albright, Sandy Berger, Jessica Matthews (of the Carnegie Endowment), Kofi Annan, the director of Win Without War; liberal military analyst William Arkin, Mike Farrell, Martin Sheen, Sam Hamill (representing 11,000 poets), W.S. Merwin, liberal panelist Carl Jeffers, genocide author Samantha Power, columnist Trudy Rubin, Maureen Dowd, Gwynne Dyer and *Al-Hayat* journalist Raghida Dergham.

In addition, the media have heavily covered the antiwar demonstrations here and around the world. A *New York Times* editorial of March 9

was so full a criticism of Bush's policies that Terry Gross had Philip Taubman on *Fresh Air* elucidate it. Chris Matthews has vehemently opposed the war and has many liberal guests on *Hardball*, including Katrina vanden Heuvel and William Arkin. Matthews was relentless in his focus on the risks and imponderables of the Iraq war. On *Hardball*, Eric Margolis, of the Council on Foreign Relations, commented that the total cost of the war may be \$400 billion, not \$200 billion, that Iraq will probably degenerate into another Lebanon or Yugoslavia, and "why not alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians" instead?

After the war began, negative criticism of Bush's policies continued. Joe Conason, Maureen Dowd, Trudy Rubin, Leonard Pitts Jr., Ellen Goodman, Joseph Galloway and many others analyzed the defects of US policies. A major brouhaha occurred when Generals McCaffrey, Schwarzkopf and Wallace criticized the US war plan. The major media publicized this debate; mulish Donald Rumsfeld blamed the media for the problem. We have also seen on TV pictures of Iraqi civilians injured by US shrapnel and starving, dehydrated civilians fighting for food and water. The corporate media reported US bombings that killed many civilians. News of an impending humanitarian catastrophe as a result of the war has been widely disseminated by print and TV media. The media also disclosed a poll showing that optimism about the war among Americans declined March 21–22 from 52 percent to 38 percent, a change that sent the White House scrambling for psychological explanations. The US media are certainly not liberal overall, but the left's disgruntled belief that they are incorrigibly conservative is just as certainly mistaken.

MARK I. SACHAROFF

ALTERMAN REPLIES

New York City

■ Mark Sacharoff can find my response in the pages of *What Liberal Media? The Truth About Bias and the News* (Basic). I invite him and the rest of our readers to peruse the opening chapter free at www.whatliberalmedia.com.

ERIC ALTERMAN

POOR NEW YORK

Rochester, NY

■ Thanks to Jack Newfield for his wonderful article, "How the Other Half Still Lives" [March 17]. The largesse the World War II "great generation" created through a combination of widely distributed government deficit spending and a vibrant capitalist marketplace

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EDITORIALS

Tomorrow in Baghdad

Even before US forces could establish order in the cities of Iraq and bring humanitarian relief to its people, the Bush Administration unleashed a barrage of threats against Syria, accusing it of aiding Islamic fighters in Iraq and possessing chemical weapons. Administration officials suggest they are sending an appropriate warning to Iraq's neighbor that certain behavior will not be tolerated. To millions of Arabs watching the events unfolding in Iraq, however, these actions are confirmation that the United States has a larger agenda in the Middle East that has little to do with the security and well-being of the Iraqi people.

Instead of rushing on to threaten its next potential target of pre-emptive war, the US should focus its energy on the reconstruction of Iraq, since it will be judged for years to come by how well it handles that task. Judging by the first weeks, there are reasons to worry that the Administration has failed to understand the nature of that challenge. If it wishes to legitimize US military action, it will have to draw on international support to bring order to the Iraqi people and to make good on its claim that it will bring them democracy. Yet Richard Perle revealed the arrant indifference of Administration hawks when he said recently, "What we have won on the battlefield is the right to establish consistent policies that are for the benefit of the people of Iraq." Uncle knows best.

After the regime's authority collapsed, seething ethnic and religious rivalries and festering hatreds boiled over. In a cultural atrocity unparalleled in our age, looters vandalized the priceless antiquities in Baghdad's National Museum and burned the National Library, where reposed the records of the world's most ancient civilization. The US government had been repeatedly urged by museum directors, archeologists and cultural leaders to protect

Iraq's archeological treasures as required by international law. Yet the commanders who had immediately posted guards at the Iraqi oil ministry somehow were unable to find soldiers to stop vandals from plundering the irreplaceable heritage of humankind. (Nor were they able to protect hospitals from pillagers of desperately needed medical supplies.) The *Washington Post* reported that the Pentagon had expected before the war that Saddam's fall "would usher in a period of chaos and lawlessness," yet it chose to go with a light, fast-moving invasion force unequipped to deal with civil disorders. Order is slowly being restored, but the explosion of destructive anarchy and lack of coherent US policies has stirred up distrust among the Iraqis, whose support will be needed to restore services and build a stable government.

Although the US military rapidly secured Iraq's oilfields before Saddam's troops could burn them, its technical specialists were unable to locate any weapons of mass destruction during more than three weeks of war, when they could have menaced US soldiers; nor was any evidence uncovered of Iraqi links to Al Qaeda. Thus the claimed basis for the invasion has yet to be established. Of course, WMDs may well be unearthed, but the question remains: If Saddam didn't (or couldn't) use them in self-defense, how can it be said he would have pre-emptively launched them against America or Israel?

If such weapons are found, under the Chemical Weapons Convention they should be verified and destroyed by international inspectors. Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency should also be allowed to return to Iraq and continue their work in accordance with the nonproliferation treaty.

Those who opposed the war must refuse to be browbeaten or silenced by the gloating "I told you so" chorus on the right (and center) and must continue to hammer at the false premises that underpinned the war. The reality is Bush deceived the American

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people when he said the war was necessary to national security, and in so doing he has abused the powers of his office, undermined the Constitution and flouted public opinion. A recent *New York Times*/CBS News poll showed that a majority of Americans oppose Bush's pre-emption doctrine. It has no basis or justification in international law—as Arab and world opinion, and Kofi Annan, agree. And it sends a message to states facing US threats that they should quickly acquire nuclear weapons in self-defense.

The only claim of legitimacy the Administration can make for the war it misled America into is that it was a humanitarian war to liberate an oppressed people. But to sustain such a claim to a skeptical world, the Administration must prove that its intentions for Iraq are honorable, and it can do that only by inviting the UN Security Council's full involvement—political as well as humanitarian—in the reconstruction of Iraq.

Beyond that, the Administration should cool its threats against Syria. It must rejoin the international community and work with it to bring democracy, freedom and human rights to Iraq, and peace to the entire region—starting with a vigorous push to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

COMMENT

Are We Safer?

The Bush Administration and its cheerleaders in the media are claiming that the “remarkable success” of the US war in Iraq proves its opponents were “spectacularly wrong”—even, some charge, unpatriotic. Intimidated by these allegations and the demonstration of overwhelming American military power, many critics of the war are falling silent. Indeed, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, no doubt speaking for several of the party's presidential candidates, has rushed to urge that “the war...not be on the ballot in 2004.”

But critics of the war have no reason to regret their views. No sensible opponent doubted that the world's most powerful military could easily crush such a lesser foe. The real issue was and remains very different: Will the Iraq war increase America's national security, as the Bush Administration has always promised and now insists is already the case, or will it undermine and diminish our national security, as thoughtful critics believed?

In the weeks, months and years ahead, we will learn the answer to that fateful question by judging developments by seven essential criteria:

(1) Will the war discourage or encourage other regional “pre-emptive” military strikes, particularly by nuclear-armed states such as, but not only, Pakistan and India?

(2) Indeed, will the Iraq war stop the proliferation of states that possess nuclear weapons or instead incite more governments to acquire them as a deterrent against another US “regime change”?

(3) Will the war, and the long US occupation that seems likely to ensue, reduce the recruitment of young Arabs by terrorist movements or will it inspire many new recruits?

(4) With or without more recruits, will the war decrease or increase the number of terrorist plots against the United States,

COMMENT

whether at home or abroad?

(5) Will the war help safeguard the vast quantities of nuclear and other materials of mass destruction that exist in the world today, and the expertise needed to operationalize them, or make them more accessible to “evil-doers”?

(6) In that connection, will Russia—which has more ill-secured devices of mass destruction than any other country and which strongly opposed and still resents the US war—now be more, or less, inclined to collaborate with Washington in safeguarding and reducing those weapons and materials?

(7) Finally, considering the rampant anti-Americanism it has provoked, will the war result in more or fewer governments willing to cooperate with—individually or in multinational organizations like the United Nations—George W. Bush’s stated top priority, the war against global terrorism?

It is by these crucial (and measurable) criteria that the American people, and any politician who wants to lead them, must judge the Administration’s war in Iraq and President Bush’s own leadership. Those of us who were against the war and continue to oppose the assumptions on which it was based fear that future events will answer these questions to the grave detriment of American and international security. As patriots, we can only hope we are wrong.

STEPHEN F. COHEN

Stephen F. Cohen is professor of Russian studies and history at New York University. His most recent book is Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia (Norton).

The Kurds Take a City

Kirkuk

By 9 AM on April 10, the day Kirkuk fell, columns of Iraqi troops who were supposed to be defending the city fled to the Baghdad Garage, the main transportation terminal, and stripped off their uniforms and boots. Barefoot, they fled south to the capital. By noon, the looting in Kirkuk had begun. In the multiethnic Arab, Turkmen and Kurdish city, it was primarily the Kurds who smashed the windows of the state-owned supermarket and hurled bolts of pink fabric, carpets, cooking oil, desk chairs and rice over the fence. The more ambitious went to the airport, hijacked Iraqi tanks and careered around the liberated town.

“I used to drive a tank in the Iraqi Army,” Nawzan Barzilini, 32, shouted down from his new acquisition. “I came this morning to fight for Kirkuk, but the soldiers ran away.” Barzilini is one of the thousands of Kurdish fighters, *peshmerga*, who unexpectedly poured into Kirkuk that morning long before the Americans arrived. Many, like Barzilini, were not following orders. He said he simply picked up a Kalashnikov and followed his comrades as they rushed in. He argued that liberating the city was his duty as a Kurd and that he was entitled to the spoils of the Baathist regime.

In the early hours, the stunned locals didn’t realize the Iraqis were gone until truck after gun-mounted truck of *peshmerga* in yellow and green bandannas rattled into the city, accompanied by a handful of journalists. I watched the faces of dazed Kirkukis change from shock to jubilation to frenzy as they surrounded our

cars, clamoring onto the hood. One man, Jabar, thrust his head in a car window and said in English long out of use, “I love the USA.” Children held up bunches of yellow flowers and Kurdish flags as the adults covered their mouths with their hands and ululated.

At first, it was easy to laud Kirkuk’s liberation as a model for the peaceful transition of power in Iraq. The city’s walls are scrawled with “Thank you Mr. Bousch.” The city’s frightened Arabs made their way into the streets. One Arab man driving a truck from an oil refinery was pulled from his car and shot in the street, but it was an isolated incident. A Kurdish passerby stopped to cover him with a blanket. For the most part, Kirkuk seemed to have avoided the sudden violence of Mosul. Yet as the days passed, the presence in Kirkuk of men like Barzilini—part fighter, part looter—threatened the calm. Kirkuk’s Arabs and Turkmen have become furious at all the looting by lawless men claiming to be *peshmerga*, and they’re beginning to fight back. Turkey’s anxiety over the Kurds is also rising, and the transition of control over Kirkuk’s oilfields promises additional complications.

Turkey’s refusal to let the United States use it as a staging area for the war produced some unintended consequences. The slow arrival of US forces in Kirkuk gave the Iraqi Army there time to watch events unfold in the south and to surrender without much bloodshed. But it also left the United States dependent on a Kurdish fighting force. The day the city fell, the Americans were nowhere to be seen. Protecting the oilfields fell to a force of 700 Kurdish fighters, who could do little as Northern Oil, an Iraqi-owned company, was looted and the smoke from a series of fires lit the horizon. Only at nightfall did the 173rd Airborne arrive. “It was like the Los Angeles riots,” said one American soldier as he patrolled the burning fields the next morning.

For now, Kirkuk’s oil is in US hands. Though Turkish observers have yet to arrive, the *peshmerga* have begun pulling out of the city without incident. After their unscheduled invasion, even the Kurdish fighters are trying to sound diplomatic.

“We are happy to let America control the oil,” says Brigadier

NATION NOTES

CHANGING OF THE GUARD. With this issue Adam Shatz, becomes literary editor. Adam, whom readers already know as a contributor to these pages, has worked at the *New York Times Book Review*, *Lingua Franca* (where he edited the books section) and *The New Yorker*. His articles on politics and culture have also appeared in the *Village Voice*, *The American Prospect*, *The New York Review of Books* and the *New York Times*. Welcome, Adam. Art Winslow leaves to devote more time to his own writing, both fiction and nonfiction. Art and this magazine go back a long way—1983, to be precise. He’s worked here as assistant copy editor, copy chief, associate literary editor, executive editor, literary editor. Art made a distinctive and lasting contribution to *The Nation* in all of these capacities. We’re glad to say that he’ll continue the association as a contributing editor. Hail, Art...

COMMENT

Rostum, a senior commander of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's military force. "Even if they keep most of it and we benefit only a little bit, it will be the first time that Kurds receive anything from oil. Besides, this is not about oil, it's about freedom." But this is still the first week, and, even so, ripples are beginning to disturb Kirkuk's surface.

As the *peshmerga* claim to pull out, the Arabs are calling for blood. They feel that they were victims of Saddam, too, so why, they ask, should they now be victims of Kurdish looting? In Mosul, angry vigilante groups have set stones in the road to check cars against incoming Kurds. It is not yet clear whether street fighting here will be next. Soon, 120,000 Kurdish families, displaced since 1991, will start to return home, and political assertions by Turkmen groups, supported by Turkey, will begin to emerge—and what good will gratitude be then? Rebuilding Kirkuk in this brittle political climate will show whether a coalition between hostile ethnic groups is at all possible in Iraq.

The battle for Kirkuk raises questions about Syria as well. While the city fell easily, there were some fierce pockets of resistance by fedayeen loyalists and foreign mercenaries. As Kurds in the north of the city spent the afternoon tugging down statues of Saddam, near the former secret police headquarters a cluster of fighters refused to surrender. Finally, after a gun battle lasting several hours, the *peshmerga* advanced to find several dead bodies of the fedayeen. One was still alive, though badly beaten, his black tunic covered in blood. As he sat on the curb, several *peshmerga* discussed whether to kill him. The man held his head in his hands as this conversation went on, saying only that he had come from Syria fifteen days earlier to fight for Saddam.

The Bush Administration's claims about the presence of chemical weapons in Syria smack of propaganda, but the presence of these Syrian fighters in Kirkuk may be spun by Washington as evidence of a relationship between Syria and Saddam.

In the short term, Kirkuk has descended into a stunned sense of order, but these quiet days are likely to give way to explosions of older, deep-seated resentments. Already Arabs are accusing the incoming Kurds of brutality reminiscent of fascism. The United States in its limited role as policeman can maintain order for now, and helped set up a governing committee of six Kurds, six Arabs and six Turkmen that will soon begin to meet, offering

at least a fig leaf of transethnic cooperation. But whether, in the long term, any occupying force can mediate the longstanding ethnic divisions is an open question. The challenge before Washington is whether it has the will and the way to establish the presence necessary to truly rebuild the city and not just keep an uneasy peace.

ELIZA GRISWOLD

Eliza Griswold is a New York-based writer reporting from northern Iraq.

Democracy Tested

The US military was deployed, the Bush Administration tells us, to bring democracy to Iraq. But the military brass and the Administration have apparently parted company on what democracy means in the United States, as the Supreme Court arguments on April 1 in the University of Michigan affirmative action cases made clear.

Solicitor General Ted Olson, arguing on behalf of the Administration, attacked the Michigan law school admissions program as "constitutionally objectionable" for naming racial diversity as a goal, "an end in and of itself," in admissions. Several Justices quickly interrupted, directing Olson's attention to the "military brief" filed in the case.

In that brief, three former chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, two former defense secretaries and retired heads of the military academies endorsed affirmative action as essential to national security in a multiracial democracy. "The military," they said, "must be permitted to train and educate a diverse officer corps" to circumvent the morale problems and communication bottlenecks of the Vietnam era, when a virtually all-white officer corps commanded large numbers of black and Latino troops.

The military brass were clear on this: Democratic authority, and thus military effectiveness, depends upon admissions procedures that recruit and select a diverse group of potential leaders. Democracy as a whole, like national security in particular, depends upon genuine, representative leadership throughout the ranks.

The mission of public colleges and universities is also a democratic one: to train leaders who can work with diverse groups of people, to provide students the skills to participate in civic life, and to encourage graduates to give back to the community, which, through taxes, made their education possible. To perform this democratic mission, public colleges must be able to select a racially, ethnically, geographically and economically diverse class of students who will enhance the educational environment while they are in school and contribute to the public good after they graduate.

The Solicitor General and other opponents of affirmative action treat admissions decisions to public colleges and law schools as if scarce slots can be allocated based on individual merit unrelated to the sacred democratic values that are at stake. And whenever race becomes an issue, a multifaceted, democratic view of merit suddenly collapses into a fealty to a "neutral" testing regime.

In fact, SAT and ACT scores often measure little more than the social capital students bring to a single, timed test. The relationship of scores to parental wealth far exceeds the relationship be-

CALVIN TRILLIN

ON THE HALLIBURTON CORPORATION'S IRAQ CONTRACTS

A lot of folks die.
At last the war ends.
The world is made safe
For Dick Cheney's friends.

COMMENT

tween test scores and grades in college or success after graduation. Poorer students and students of color, who on average perform less well on these standardized tests than their richer and whiter peers, can do just as well academically and professionally when given the chance. Evidence from Texas shows that those admitted because they graduated in the top 10 percent of their high school class have higher grades as college freshmen than those who are admitted based on their test scores. Even more important, a study of Michigan's graduates found the black and Latino lawyers were those most likely to serve underrepresented communities and to fulfill public citizenship obligations generally. Students with the highest test scores, by contrast, are less likely to give back to the community that subsidized their education. Apparently high scores communicate a sense of entitlement without responsibility.

The authors of a Century Foundation study, Anthony Carnevale and Stephen Rose, call the overreliance on a single indicator such as test performance "skinny merit." Through dependence on test scores, higher education has become a gift the poor give to the rich. Poor people pay taxes for rich people to attend elite public colleges and universities where graduates gain, through networking and credentialing opportunities, a large share of coveted posts in the public and private sectors.

Carnevale and Rose studied the family fortunes of students at the 146 most selective colleges and universities. We are, Carnevale says, creating "an inequality machine" with a "brutally efficient sorting" system that allows students from the upper quartile of income in the country to fill three-fourths of the slots

at these schools, while only 3 percent of students come from the bottom quartile. That ratio was borne out in the research that produced the Texas 10 percent plan. Historically, 75 percent of each freshman class there was filled by students from 150 suburban and private high schools, in a state with 1,500 public high schools. At Michigan's flagship university, high schools in the most affluent suburbs also dominate the freshman class. Affirmative action diversifies the student body, at least around the margins, by race and income. While whites from the highest income quartile have cornered the admissions market at selective schools like Michigan, black and Latino beneficiaries of affirmative action hover around the middle of the economic indicators.

Democracy means access for all of the people, not just the elite. Yet it is the military—rather than higher education—that is performing the essential democratic function of breaking down rigid class and race barriers. As Representative Charles Rangel points out, blacks and Latinos, as well as working-class whites, are disproportionately represented among the enlisted ranks.

Taxpayers subsidize public colleges to provide a representative group of future leaders, to train those leaders in democratic citizenship, and to enable them to problem-solve in a diverse society with a knowledge-based economy. Even those who are ambivalent about the "diversity rationale" should understand the democratic imperative for robust rather than "skinny" merit in rationing access to higher education. "If you have an all-black army and an all-white law school," University of Michigan law

(Continued on Page 24)

In Fact . . .

FRED J. COOK

■ Ralph Nader writes: It's doubtful there has ever been a better, more dauntless and more unsung investigative reporter than Fred J. Cook. For *Nation* readers from the 1950s through the 1980s, Fred blazed wide pathways with his exposés of New York City corruption, the abuses and follies of the CIA and the FBI, and the waste and overreaching of the military-industrial complex. These and other subjects were nearly journalistic taboos before Cook's lucid muckraking and synthesis of ideas and trunkloads of "disparate" information, supplied him by the *Nation's* legendary editor, Carey McWilliams, broke them into print. Other reporters followed him and expanded the public's right to know about secret government and the corporate state. Publishers produced longer book versions of Cook's reportage reaching wider audiences. Young reporters, including myself, were inspired to open new areas of injustice shielded from public scrutiny. Fred's last books were on the oil industry giants, the Ku Klux Klan and his autobiography. He told me how disappointed he was that reviewers had ignored the books. Their sales were small. Even journalism schools showed no interest in the life story of a small-town reporter who gave pride to his often-cowed profession. After these unrequited efforts, Cook turned in his typewriter and went into quiet retirement. Cook and McWilliams were possibly the greatest reporter-editor team

in post-World War II journalism in our country. They stand as a luminous model challenging the trivialization of the news by a press in indentured servitude to corporate supremacists.

KUDOS TO KLAWANS

■ *Nation* movie critic Stuart Klawans has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. Our congratulations.

THIS WEEK ON THE WEB

■ Tim Shorrock examines Paul Wolfowitz's vision, Ari Weisbard charts the influence of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq and *The Nation* tells how to defeat the nomination of Bush judicial appointee Priscilla Owen (www.thenation.com).

NEWS OF THE WEAK IN REVIEW

■ Representative Scott McInnis announced that he has asked the Veterans Affairs Department to stop purchasing tombstones from Imerys, a French company that's the main supplier of headstones for national cemeteries. "It's obviously inappropriate," McInnis said, "for a company owned by French interests to be supplying headstones for the VA when the French have done everything in their power to undermine the very troops from whose sacrifice they now stand to profit."

JONATHAN SCHELL

The Removed State

In the past 200 years, all of the earth's great territorial empires, whether dynastic or colonial, or both, have been destroyed. The list includes the Russian empire of the czars; the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the Habsburgs; the German empire of the Hohenzollerns, the Ottoman Empire, the Napoleonic Empire, the overseas empires of Holland, England, France, Belgium, Italy and Japan, Hitler's "thousand-year Reich" and the Soviet empire. They were brought down by a force that, to the indignation and astonishment of the imperialists, turned out to be irresistible: the resolve of peoples, no matter how few they were or how poor, to govern themselves.

With its takeover of Iraq, the United States is attempting to reverse this universal historical verdict. It is seeking to reinvent the imperial tradition and reintroduce imperial rule—and on a global scale—for the twenty-first century. Some elements, like the danger of weapons of mass destruction, are new. Yet any student of imperialism will be struck by the similarities between the old style of imperialism and the new: the gigantic disparity between the technical and military might of the conquerors and the conquered; the inextricable combination of rapacious commercial interest and geopolitical ambition and design; the distortion and erosion of domestic constitutions by the immense military establishments, overt and covert, required for foreign domination; the use of one colony as a stepping stone to seize others or pressure them into compliance with the imperial agenda; the appeal to jingoism on the home front. True, American officials state at every opportunity that they do not intend to "occupy" Iraq. But then the British in the nineteenth century said the same thing. Two years before the liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone ordered the conquest of Egypt he declared that his heart's desire was an "Egypt for the Egyptians." The liberal imperialist Lord Palmerston said in 1842 in defense of his gunboat diplomacy, "It is, that commerce may go freely forth, leading civilization with one hand, and peace with the other, to render mankind happier, wiser, better." When it came to rule, the British preferred, wherever possible, not "direct rule" but a sort of covert domination called "influence" or "indirect rule" or "paramountcy" (the British were as richly inventive of euphemisms as the United States is today). Then as now, imperialism, in the words of the great anti-imperialist Ernest Hobson, was "floated on a sea of vague, shifty, well-sounding phrases which are seldom tested by close contact with fact."

It was one thing, however, for Europeans, in newfound possession of modern tools of technical and organizational superiority, to subjugate "backward" foreign peoples in 1700 or 1800 or 1900. But can it be done again, in our century, in the wake of that project's universal rejection by the peoples of the earth? So far, the outlook is unpromising. The United States vowed to bring about "regime change" in Iraq. The phrase has rightly been criticized as an outrageously mild euphemism—a vague, well-sounding, shifty phrase if there ever was one—for an extremely violent act; but now it turns out that the expression defined a deeper problem. If I am going to change the oil in my car, I must, before I remove the old oil in the crankcase, have new oil ready to put in. Otherwise,

my car will quickly overheat and break down on the road. This is roughly the condition of Iraq two weeks after the destruction of its former government. The United States, it turns out, forgot to bring a new government with it when it set out from Kuwait to Baghdad. The troops brought plenty of MREs (meals ready to eat) but no GRR (government ready to rule). American forces had no intention of becoming a police force, Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks told the press. Did the Administration perhaps take its own slippery rhetoric about not occupying Iraq too seriously? The result was a vacuum of authority soon filled by nearly universal looting. Many Iraqis made clear their hatred of the old regime and their joy at its disappearance; but it appears that they had little more confidence in the invader. Finding themselves caught between local misrule and foreign rule, did they perhaps decide that they had a momentary opportunity to grab something for themselves and set about sacking their own country? A journalist, upon arriving in an Iraqi city, described it as "prelooted." Did the Iraqis, in anticipation of foreign exploitation, "preloot" their whole country?

The United States thus achieved Regime Removal but not the promised Regime Change. There were, we can now see, no plans even to keep order in Iraq, much less to administer it, or organize a government there. The famous war plan was much discussed; the peace plan, it appears, did not even exist.

This became clear when Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld referred to the raging anarchy in Iraq as "untidy," and America's new viceroy in Iraq, retired Gen. Jay Garner, newly arrived in the city of Nasiriyah from the Hilton hotel in Kuwait, likened events to the American constitutional convention of 1787, remarking rhetorically, "I don't think they had a love-in when they had Philadelphia." Does he really think that mayhem in Iraq, including the extinction of the better part of the country's cultural treasures, has any resemblance to the deliberations by which Washington, Franklin and Madison framed the Constitution of the United States? Is such a man fit to run a country?

So far, the American military giant has proved to be a political pygmy. The Shiite cleric Abdel Majid al-Khoei, who was imported into Iraq from London by the "coalition" forces, was promptly hacked to death by local people. The gathering of Iraqis invited by the United States to meet at a US military base has been boycotted by the country's most important political groups. In Mosul, American troops have fired upon an angry mob, killing seven. "It's a show of force, but people don't understand it," a soldier in Mosul told the *Times*. "They're not grateful."

Before the war began, it was often said that winning the war would be easy and winning the peace hard. And it was surely always clear even to the war's opponents that the United States could drive its tanks from Kuwait to Baghdad, whereupon the regime of Saddam Hussein would dissolve. Yet was it ever certain that what followed the conventional engagements would be a peace? With every day that passes, "the peace" looks more like another war.

Jonathan Schell, the Nation Institute's Harold Willens Peace Fellow, is the author of the forthcoming The Unconquerable World (Metropolitan).

KATHA POLLITT

Pride and Prejudice

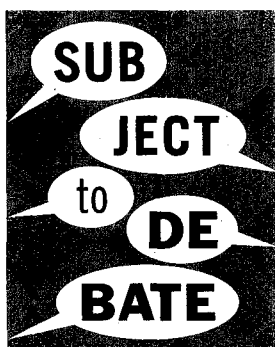
How do we know the economy is in bad shape? Unemployed white male hotshots are back in the news. "This man used to make \$300,000 a year," reads the *New York Times Magazine's* cover. "Now he's selling khakis." The grim black-and-white cover photo shows a resentful-looking bald man with a clipboard and Gap tag, sporting a Silicon Alley hipster's five-day-old beard. He's "interactive industry pioneer" Jeff Einstein, one of three men profiled in "Commute to Nowhere" by Jonathan Mahler who lost their high-paying jobs when the New Economy tanked and have had trouble resigning themselves to the kinds of jobs that are left: selling pants for Jeff; substitute teaching in the public schools for Lou Casagrande, a former information-technology consultant (at \$100,000 a year); and volunteering as a "networking" coordinator for Tom Pyle, who'd left the stressful life of banking (\$200,000) for the calmer waters of the nonprofit sector (\$100,000), only to be laid off within six months.

After more than a year holding out for the next big thing, their wallets are thin, their cars are falling apart, their self-esteem is wilted and their marriages aren't in such great shape either: Jeff takes the Gap job only because his wife finally threatens to evict him if he doesn't start helping out with the rent. (Just between you and me, I suspect he could have done better but took the Gap job just to spite her.) It's all about masculinity, Mahler informs us. Women have been as likely to lose their jobs as men in the current climate, but "for most women, survival trumps ego; they simply adapt and find some job." I like that "simply." No cover story there.

But wait. Those \$10-an-hour jobs, the ones we're supposed to pity the men for having lowered their masculine dignity to take, look kind of familiar, don't they? They're the "good jobs" women on welfare are encouraged to get, the ones that are supposed to transform them from mooching layabouts to respectable, economically self-sufficient, upright and orderly citizens. (Of course, both Tom and his stay-at-home wife recoil at the possibility that *she* may have to get a job. I guess this is because, unlike poor single mothers, she's a "homemaker.")

What happened to all those homilies about personal responsibility and the dignity of a job—any job—that were trotted out to justify forcing welfare mothers to work off their checks at sub-minimum wage by cleaning toilets in public parks or scraping chewing gum off subway platforms? Somehow, those sermons don't apply to Mahler's guys, but only to those single mothers of small children who get up at dawn for long bus rides to jobs as waitresses or hotel maids or fast-food workers—jobs that one calls "menial" at the risk of being tarred as an elitist snob by welfare-reform enthusiasts. The point is not so much work—the exchange of labor for pay and benefits—but work *experience*: work as behavior modification. For Mahler's subjects, work is about masculine identity, so a low-status job is worse than none. Poor women apparently have no dignity to be affronted.

Take the first job you can get and be glad you have it is the philosophy of welfare today. If you are poor and had the bad judgment



to become a single mother, well, no education and training for you. The welfare reauthorization bill, approved by the House and soon to be voted on by the Senate, raises the percentage of welfare clients who must work from 50 to 70 percent and ups work requirements for single parents from twenty to forty hours a week. This is much more even than the norm for working mothers, which is thirty-one to thirty-five hours. A proposal by House Democrat Ben Cardin that education and training count toward that total was rejected along party lines. In New York

City, where unemployment is 8.6 percent, and half of welfare clients didn't graduate high school, Mayor Bloomberg vetoed a similar set of modifications from the City Council. (The Council overrode his veto, and he has threatened a legal challenge.)

Is there a middle-class person in America who doesn't understand the relation of education and skills to self-support in the twenty-first century? You'd almost think the people who write the welfare laws don't want poor women to earn a middle-class income—just to adopt the imaginary middle-class sexual values embodied in abstinence classes and marriage promotion schemes, which welfare reauthorization funds to the tune of \$50 million and \$300 million a year, respectively.

Maybe I lack sufficient regard for the male ego, but I found it hard to shed a tear for the men in Mahler's profile. They may have lost their dreams of financial glory, but this is not exactly *King Lear*. By the standards of normal life they're not doing so badly: They live in safe suburban neighborhoods, with food on the table and good schools for the kids. Indeed, Jeff's wife earns \$80,000 a year, which puts the family in the top third of US household incomes before he's sold a single pair of jeans. At the end of the piece, we learn that Lou and Tom have come to terms with reality and are planning to become public school teachers. This is hardly a tragedy. In fact, it will likely be the first really useful and important work either has ever done.

Zora Neale Hurston, a great writer who made quite a bit of money in her time, ended her days as a cleaning lady. That's what I call tragic. All over America, single mothers with nothing like the advantages or prospects of Jeff, Lou and Tom are being told to sink or swim, and their children along with them. That's tragic too.

* * *

Once again, the Bosnian Initiative Frankfurt, a German human rights group, is providing "vacations from war" for displaced children and teens of all Bosnian ethnicities. Through their generous donations over the years, *Nation* readers have become a mainstay of this wonderful project, which last year provided two weeks of summer camp on the Croatian seacoast for an astonishing 1,500 children. (This year, for the second time, the group hopes to bring a hundred Israeli and Palestinian kids together as well.) It takes \$130 to give one child respite from war and its aftermath, but donations of any size are appreciated. Checks made out to Bosnian Initiative Frankfurt can be mailed to me at *The Nation*, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, and I will forward them. ■

ERIC ALTERMAN

Bush Goes AWOL

One of the many maddening feats of this Administration is that in choosing to fight the war on terror by going to war with Iraq, George W. Bush has inspired new terrorist threats to the United States—according to the official testimony of his own CIA—where none existed. At the same time, he purposely starves those localities and institutions on which the complex and expensive task of terrorist protection ultimately falls.

The Economist compares New York City to Atlas, bearing the weight of the world on its shoulders.

Already reeling from a massive deficit, declining income and the economic aftershocks of 9/11, the city must pay an estimated \$1 billion a year for emergency and counterterrorism costs. Bush could care less. After attempting to stiff New York entirely, Congress has finally agreed to kick in about \$200 million, far more than Bush proposed. My shaken city can ill afford to make up the difference. It already has 4,000 fewer cops than it did two years ago but must assign more than a thousand of those remaining to the terrorist beat. It may shutter forty fire companies. Massive layoffs, tax hikes and cutbacks in every kind of social service are in the offing. And Gotham is hardly alone. Enhanced security measures cost the nation's cities an estimated \$2.6 billion in the fifteen months after 9/11.

But as with Vietnam, "W" is AWOL and Cheney has "other priorities." They have not merely ignored "homeland" protection, they have sabotaged it. Shocking, yes. But don't take my word for it. A January Brookings Institution report explains, "President Bush vetoed several specific (and relatively cost-effective) measures proposed by Congress that would have addressed critical national vulnerabilities. As a result, the country remains more vulnerable than it should be today." A Council on Foreign Relations task force chaired by Gary Hart and Warren Rudman concurs: "America remains dangerously unprepared to prevent and respond to a catastrophic terrorist attack on U.S. soil," it warns.

Power plants constitute obvious terrorist targets but are frequently operated by private or semiprivate corporations unwilling to pay to protect them. According to Brookings, the Administration has done nothing—repeat, nothing—to help or encourage "private-sector firms—even ones that handle dangerous materials—toward improving their own security." Last year, the Pittsburgh *Tribune-Review* discovered a frightening series of security lapses at three separate chemical plants in Houston and Chicago, which, if attacked, could endanger 1 million people each. The New York *Daily News* found one plant in East Rutherford, New Jersey, where an attack could threaten the lives of more than 7 million people (including, um, *mine*). And it employed virtually no security at all. Spencer Abraham, Bush's Energy Secretary, worried in a March 2002 letter to OMB director Mitch Daniels that firms "are storing vast amounts of materials that remain highly volatile and subject to unthinkable consequences if placed in the wrong hands." However, he added, due to insufficient funding, "the Department now is unable to meet the next round of critical securi-

STOP THE
PRESSES

ty mission requirements.... Failure to support these urgent security requirements," he concluded, "is a risk that would be unwise." Nevertheless, *The New Republic's* Jonathan Chait reports, Bush agreed to propose a mere 7 percent of what Abraham said would be needed just to get started.

Chait has more: Bush refused to compensate healthcare workers injured or killed by the small-pox inoculation program. His budget is squeezing the Coast Guard, in charge of port security. He is starving "first responders"—the very heroes of

9/11 to whom he dishonestly promised so much. And the Customs Service got not a single penny in new funding in the Administration's budget. With everyone losing sleep over "loose nukes" falling into terrorist hands, Bush even tried to cut overseas nuclear security funding by 5 percent.

How does he get away with it? Quite easily, apparently. In the Orwellian universe of the "liberal media," Bush can inspire new terrorist threats, ignore the ones we already face and evade responsibility for both because he is "tough" enough to spit in the face of world opinion.

In a sensible media universe, Chait's cover story, "The 9/10 President," would have set off a journalistic firestorm. But the only place I've seen it picked up is in Paul Krugman's invaluable *New York Times* column. Using the Homeland Security Department's original spending figures, Krugman took Chait one step further on April 1, arguing that Bush's plan to spend seven times as much per capita on protection for Wyoming as for New York—where, need I point out, a few more obvious terrorist targets are located—"was adopted precisely because it caters to that same constituency" that enabled Bush's "election." Krugman puts the Rove/Bush strategy thus: "Even in a time of war—a war that seems oddly unrelated to the terrorist threat—the Bush administration isn't serious about protecting the homeland. Instead, it continues to subordinate U.S. security needs to its unchanged political agenda."

This is an eerie moment in American political history. George W. Bush was defeated in the popular vote by his more liberal opponent but rules from the most extreme wing of his party. He campaigned as a fiscal conservative but has pushed tax cuts that will create a deficit larger than any in US history. As a candidate, he articulated the need for a "humble" foreign policy but now conducts it with a degree of hubris that makes Lyndon Johnson look like the Dalai Lama. His hypocrisy, in other words, is so great as to be almost unfathomable, and yet he has somehow managed to convince the media to admire him for his "moral clarity."

Thanks to Bush & Co., America is hated the world over as never before. Deficits are exploding, unemployment remains high, the stock market is still in the tank and interest rates are poised to take off. The country is headed to hell in a handbasket from so many directions one can barely keep track. And yet the increasingly Foxified media tell a story only of heroism: of the US military, of the American people and of the President of the United States, who has so far managed to avoid service to either one. ■

ARTICLES

SUSAN SONTAG on COURAGE and RESISTANCE

The following is the keynote address given at the Rothko Chapel in Houston on March 30 on the occasion of the presentation of the Oscar Romero Award to Ishai Menuchin, chairman of Yesh Gvul ("There Is a Limit"), the Israeli soldiers' movement for selective refusal to serve in the occupied territories. —The Editors

Allow me to invoke not one but two, only two, who were heroes—among millions of heroes. Who were victims—among tens of millions of victims.

The first: Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, murdered in his vestments, while saying mass in the cathedral on March 24, 1980—twenty-three years ago—because he had become “a vocal advocate of a just peace, and had openly opposed the forces of violence and oppression.” (I am quoting from the description of the Oscar Romero Award, being given today to Ishai Menuchin.)

The second: Rachel Corrie, a 23-year-old college student from Olympia, Washington, murdered in the bright neon-orange jacket with Day-Glo striping that “human shields” wear to make themselves quite visible, and possibly safer, while trying to stop one of the almost daily house demolitions by Israeli forces in Rafah, a town in the southern Gaza Strip (where Gaza abuts the Egyptian border), on March 16, 2003. Standing in front of a Palestinian physician’s house that had been targeted for demolition, Corrie, one of eight young American and British human-shield volunteers in Rafah, had been waving and shouting at the driver of an oncoming armored D-9 bulldozer through her megaphone, then dropped to her knees in the path

of the supersized bulldozer...which did not slow down.

Two emblematic figures of sacrifice, killed by the forces of violence and oppression to which they were offering nonviolent, principled, dangerous opposition.

Let’s start with risk. The risk of being punished. The risk of being isolated. The risk of being injured or killed. The risk of being scorned. We are all conscripts in one sense or another. For all of us, it is hard to break ranks; to incur the disapproval, the censure, the violence of an offended majority with a different idea of loyalty. We shelter under banner words like justice, peace and reconciliation that enroll us in new, if much smaller and relatively powerless, communities of the like-minded. That mobilize us for the demonstration, the protest and the public performance of acts of civil disobedience—not for the parade ground and the battlefield.

To fall out of step with one’s tribe; to step beyond one’s tribe into a world that is larger mentally but smaller numerically—if alienation or dissidence is not your habitual or gratifying posture, this is a complex, difficult process. It is hard to defy the wisdom of the tribe, the wisdom that values the lives of members of the tribe above all others. It will always be unpopular—it will always be deemed unpatriotic—to say that the lives of the members of the other tribe are as valuable as one’s own. It is easier to give one’s allegiance to those we know, to those we see, to those with whom we are embedded, to those with whom we share—as we may—a community of fear.

Let’s not underestimate the force of what we oppose. Let’s not underestimate the retaliation that may be visited on those who

dare to dissent from the brutalities and repressions thought justified by the fears of the majority. We are flesh. We can be punctured by a bayonet, torn apart by a suicide bomber. We can be crushed by a bulldozer, gunned down in a cathedral. Fear binds people together. And fear disperses them. Courage inspires communities: the courage of an example—for courage is as contagious as fear. But courage, certain kinds of courage, can also isolate the brave.

The perennial destiny of principles: While everyone professes to have them, they are likely to be sacrificed when they become inconveniencing. Generally a moral principle is something that puts one at variance with accepted practice. And that variance has consequences, sometimes unpleasant consequences, as the community takes its revenge on those who challenge its contradictions—who want a society actually to uphold the principles it professes to defend.

The standard that a society should actually embody its own professed principles is a utopian one, in the sense that moral principles contradict the way things really are—and always will be. How things really are—and always will be—is neither all evil nor all good but deficient, inconsistent, inferior. Principles invite us to do something about the morass of contradictions in which we function morally. Principles invite us to clean up our act, to become intolerant of moral laxity and compromise and cowardice and the turning away from what is upsetting: that secret gnawing of the heart that tells us that what we are doing is not right, and so counsels us that we'd be better off just not thinking about it.

The cry of the anti-principled: "I'm doing the best I can." The best given the circumstances, of course.

Let's say, the principle is: It's wrong to oppress and humiliate a whole people. To deprive them systematically of lodging and proper nutrition; to destroy their habitations, means of livelihood, access to education and medical care, and ability to consort with one another. That these practices are wrong, whatever the provocation. And there is provocation. That, too, should not be denied.

At the center of our moral life and our moral imagination are the great models of resistance: the great stories of those who have said no. No, I will not serve. What models, what stories? A Mormon may resist the outlawing of polygamy. An anti-abortion militant may resist the law that has made abortion legal. They, too, will invoke the claims of religion (or faith) and morality against the edicts of civil society. Appeal to the existence of a higher law that authorizes us to defy the laws of the state can be used to justify criminal transgression as well as the noblest struggle for justice.

Courage has no moral value in itself, for courage is not, in itself, a moral virtue. Vicious scoundrels, murderers, terrorists, may be brave. To describe courage as a virtue, we need an adjective: We speak of "moral courage"—because there is such a thing as amoral courage, too. And resistance has no value in itself. It is

the content of the resistance that determines its merit, its moral necessity. Let's say: resistance to a criminal war. Let's say: resistance to the occupation and annexation of another people's land.

Again: There is nothing inherently superior about resistance. All our claims for the righteousness of resistance rest on the rightness of the claim that the resisters are acting in the name of justice. And the justice of the cause does not depend on, and is not enhanced by, the virtue of those who make the assertion. It depends first and last on the truth of a description of a state of affairs that is, truly, unjust and unnecessary.

Here is what I believe to be a truthful description of a state of affairs that has taken me many years of uncertainty, ignorance and anguish to acknowledge: A wounded and fearful country, Israel, is going through the greatest crisis of its turbulent history, brought about by the policy of steadily increasing and reinforcing settlements on the territories won after its victory in the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. The decision of successive Israeli governments to retain control over the West Bank and Gaza, thereby denying their Palestinian neighbors a state of their own, is

a catastrophe—moral, human and political—for both peoples. The Palestinians need a sovereign state. Israel needs a sovereign Palestinian state. Those of us abroad who wish

At the center of our moral life and our moral imagination are the great models of resistance: the great stories of those who have said no.

for Israel to survive cannot, should not, wish it to survive no matter what, no matter how. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to courageous Israeli Jewish witnesses, journalists, architects, poets, novelists, professors—among others—who have described and documented and protested and militated against the sufferings of the Palestinians living under the increasingly cruel terms of Israeli military subjugation and settler annexation.

Our greatest admiration must go to the brave Israeli soldiers, represented here by Ishai Menuchin, who refuse to serve beyond the 1967 borders. These soldiers know that all settlements are bound to be evacuated in the end. These soldiers, who are Jews, take seriously the principle put forward at the Nuremberg trials in 1945–46: namely, that a soldier is not obliged to obey unjust orders, orders that contravene the laws of war—indeed, one has an obligation to disobey them.

The Israeli soldiers who are resisting service in the occupied territories are not refusing a particular order. They are refusing to enter the space where illegitimate orders are bound to be given—that is, where it is more than probable that they will be ordered to perform actions that continue the oppression and humiliation of Palestinian civilians. Houses are demolished, groves are uprooted, the stalls of a village market are bulldozed, a cultural center is looted; and now, nearly every day, civilians of all ages are fired on and killed. There can be no disputing the mounting cruelty of the Israeli occupation of the 22 percent of the former territory of British Palestine on which a Palestinian state will be erected. These soldiers believe, as I do, that there should be an unconditional withdrawal from the occupied territories. They have declared collectively that they will not continue to fight beyond the 1967 borders "in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people."

What the refuseniks have done—there are now more than

Regarding the Pain of Others, Susan Sontag's most recent book, has just been published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. This article © 2003 by Susan Sontag.

1,000 of them, more than 250 of whom have gone to prison—does not contribute to telling us how the Israelis and Palestinians can make peace, beyond the irrevocable demand that the settlements be disbanded. The actions of this heroic minority cannot contribute to the much-needed reform and democratization of the Palestinian Authority. Their stand will not lessen the grip of religious bigotry and racism in Israeli society or reduce the dissemination of virulent anti-Semitic propaganda in the aggrieved Arab world. It will not stop the suicide bombers.

It simply declares: enough. Or: there is a limit. *Yesh gvul*. It provides a model of resistance. Of disobedience. For which there will always be penalties.

None of us have yet to endure anything like what these brave conscripts are enduring, many of whom have gone to jail. To speak for peace at this moment in this country is merely to be jeered (as in the recent Academy Awards ceremony), harassed, blacklisted (the banning by one powerful chain of radio stations of the Dixie Chicks); in short, to be reviled as unpatriotic.

Our “United We Stand” or “Winner Takes All” ethos: The United States is a country that has made patriotism equivalent to consensus. Tocqueville, still the greatest observer of the United States, remarked on an unprecedented degree of conformity in the then-new country, and 168 more years have only confirmed his observation.

Sometimes, given the new, radical turn in American foreign policy, it seems as if it was inevitable that the national consensus on the greatness of America, which may be activated to an extraordinary pitch of triumphalist national self-regard, was bound eventually to find expression in wars like the present one, which are assented to by a majority of the population, who have been persuaded that America has the right—even the duty—to dominate the world.

The usual way of heralding people who act on principle is to say that they are the vanguard of an eventually triumphant revolt against injustice. But what if they're not? What if the evil is really unstoppable? At least in the short run. And that short run may be—is going to be—very long indeed.

My admiration for the soldiers who are resisting service in the occupied territories is as fierce as my belief that it will be a long time before their view prevails. But what haunts me at this moment—for obvious reasons—is acting on principle when it isn't going to alter the obvious distribution of force, the rank injustice and murderousness of a government policy that claims to be acting in the name not of peace but of security.

The force of arms has its own logic. If you commit an aggression and others resist, it is easy to convince the home front that the fighting must continue. Once the troops are there, they must be supported. It becomes irrelevant to question why the troops are there in the first place.

The soldiers are there because “we” are being attacked or menaced. Never mind that we may have attacked them first. They are now attacking back, causing casualties. Behaving in ways that defy the “proper” conduct of war. Behaving like “savages,” as people in our part of the world like to call people in

that part of the world. And their “savage” or “unlawful” actions give new justification to new aggressions. And new impetus to repress or censor or persecute citizens who oppose the aggression the government has undertaken.

Let's not underestimate the force of what we are opposing. The world is, for almost everyone, that over which we have virtually no control. Common sense and the sense of self-protectiveness tell us to accommodate to what we cannot change.

It's not hard to see how some of us might be persuaded of the justice, the necessity of a war. Especially of a war that is formulated as a small, limited military action that will actually contribute to peace or improve security; of an aggression that announces itself as a campaign of disarmament—admittedly, disarmament of the enemy; and, regrettably, requiring the application of overpowering force. An invasion that calls itself, officially, a liberation.

Every violence in war has been justified as a retaliation. We are threatened. We are defending ourselves. The others, they

want to kill us. We must stop them. And from there: We must stop them before they have a chance to carry out their plans. And since those who would attack us are sheltering behind noncombatants, no aspect of civil life can be immune to our depredations.

Never mind the disparity of forces, of wealth, of firepower—or simply of population. How many Americans know that the population of Iraq is 24 million, half of whom are children? (The population of the United States, as you will remember, is 290 million.) Not to support those who are coming under fire from the enemy seems like treason.

It may be that, in some cases, the threat is real. In such circumstances, the bearer of the moral principle seems like someone running alongside a moving train, yelling “Stop! Stop!” Can the train be stopped? No, it can't. At least, not now. Will other people on the train be moved to jump off and join those on the ground? Maybe some will, but most won't. (At least, not until they have a whole new panoply of fears.)

The dramaturgy of “acting on principle” tells us that we don't have to think about whether acting on principle is expedient, or whether we can count on the eventual success of the actions we have undertaken. Acting on principle is, we're told, a good in itself. But it is still a political act, in the sense that you're not doing it for yourself. You don't do it just to be in the right, or to appease your own conscience; much less because you are confident your action will achieve its aim. You resist as an act of solidarity. With communities of the principled and the disobedient: here, elsewhere. In the present. In the future.

Thoreau's going to prison in 1846 for refusing to pay the poll tax in protest against the American war on Mexico hardly stopped the war. But the resonance of that most unpunishing and briefest spell of imprisonment (famously, a single night in jail) has not ceased to inspire principled resistance to injustice through the second half of the twentieth century and into our new era. The movement in the late 1980s to shut down the Nevada Test Site, a key location for the nuclear arms race, failed in its goal; the operations of the test site were unaffected by the protests. But it led directly to

Let's not underestimate the force of what we are opposing. The world is, for almost everyone, that over which we have virtually no control.

the formation of a movement of protesters in faraway Alma Ata, who eventually succeeded in shutting down the main Soviet test site in Kazakhstan, citing the Nevada antinuclear activists as their inspiration and expressing solidarity with the Native Americans on whose land the Nevada Test Site had been located.

The likelihood that your acts of resistance cannot stop the injustice does not exempt you from acting in what you sincerely and reflectively hold to be the best interests of your community.

Thus: It is not in the best interests of Israel to be an oppressor.

Thus: It is not in the best interests of the United States to be a hyperpower, capable of imposing its will on any country in the world, as it chooses.

What is in the true interests of a modern community is justice.

It cannot be right to systematically oppress and confine a neighboring people. It is surely false to think that murder, expulsion, annexations, the building of walls—all that has contributed to reducing a whole people to dependence, penury and despair—will bring security and peace to the oppressors. It cannot be right that a President of the United States seems to believe that he has

a mandate to be President of the planet—and announces that those who are not with America are with “the terrorists.”

Those brave Israeli Jews who, in fervent and active opposition to the policies of the present government of their country, have spoken up on behalf of the plight and the rights of Palestinians are defending the true interests of Israel. Those of us who are opposed to the plans of the present government of the United States for global hegemony are patriots speaking for the best interests of the United States.

Beyond these struggles, which are worthy of our passionate adherence, it is important to remember that in programs of political resistance the relation of cause and effect is convoluted, and often indirect. All struggle, all resistance is—must be—concrete. And all struggle has a global resonance.

If not here, then there. If not now, then soon. Elsewhere as well as here.

To Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero.

To Rachel Corrie.

And to Ishai Menuchin and his comrades.

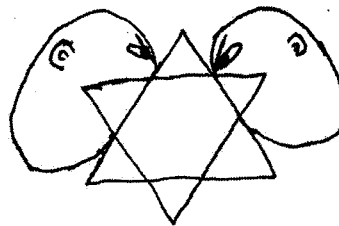
WHO'S REALLY BEHIND THE CRUDE EQUATION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND 'THE JEWS'?

‘Anti-Semitism,’ Israel and the Left

PHILIP GREEN

The war on Iraq has unleashed some familiar conspiracy theories in recent months, on both the right and the left. Lyndon LaRouche laid blame for the coming war at the feet of “a nest of Israeli agents inside the US government”; then Pat Buchanan blamed the US invasion of Iraq on a “cabal” of Jewish intellectuals willing to “conscript American blood to make the world safe for Israel.” On the other side of the tally, Democratic Representative James Moran declared, “If it were not for the strong support of the Jewish community for this war in Iraq, we would not be doing this,” while a Democratic New York City Council member, Robert Jackson, attributed opposition to a local antiwar resolution to Jewish colleagues who saw New York only as their “home away from home” and believed the resolution would “not be in the best interests of the State of Israel.” The idea that Jews loyal to Israel over America were driving the United States to war gained enough force to garner mention in the editorial pages of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, and finally ended up at the feet of Colin Powell, who, in what was surely a historical first for a Secretary of State on the eve of armed conflict, was asked by a member of Congress to publicly disavow that a “cabal” was behind this war.

Somehow, though, despite the broad circulation—and broad denunciation—of this poisonous idea, only the left seems



SCOTT MENCHIN

doomed to bear the taint of anti-Semitism. Why should this be so?

The furor over events in San Francisco leading up to the massive February antiwar marches is telling. Rabbi Michael Lerner, the founder of *Tikkun*, claimed that he was excluded from a list of potential speakers at the Bay Area event because he had publicly criticized ANSWER, one of the sponsors, for being anti-Israel. What might have been a minor back-room squabble went public when a group of left writers (many affiliated with *The Nation*) circulated a petition on his behalf and Lerner himself detailed his charges in the prowar *Wall Street Journal*. His story, headlined “The Antiwar Anti-Semites,” condemned “anti-Semitism and Israel-bashing on the left.” Letter writers to the *Journal* responded with barely concealed glee at Lerner’s outing of the left, one opining venomously that “the American far left would no more tolerate criticism of its anti-Semitism than the Communists and Nazis tolerated criticism of theirs.” Since that writer has certainly not been threatened with removal to the camps or the gulag, we can take his letter for what it really is: an attempt to blackmail “the far left” into silence on a crucial issue.

This fraught accusation of “left-wing anti-Semitism” surfaces so regularly that before considering it, we need to remind ourselves what anti-Semitism—the real thing—has actually looked like over the centuries. It had (and has) nothing to do with Israel or Zionism, but was rather a prototypical racist stereotyping, by means of which the alleged traits of certain individuals—“money-grubbing,” “pushiness,” moral degener-

Philip Green is on the editorial board of *The Nation*. His most recent book is *Equality & Democracy* (New Press).

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acy—are transformed via the alchemy of paranoid fantasy into the collective persona of “Jews” or “the Jew.”

For the anti-Semite, as for all racists, these racial distinctions are always invidious, never just descriptive. This aspect of anti-Semitism has at times been disguised, since whereas for most other racisms the stigmatized group is alleged to be both morally and culturally inferior, anti-Semitism often combines an allegation of moral degeneracy or social inferiority with a paranoid fear of a dangerous superiority, or envy of supposed intellectual or economic attainment. Envy, though, is as unpleasant as disdain, especially in the form of litanies of what “your people” have so wonderfully accomplished. For the anti-Semite, then, the Jew is not just Jewish; he stands for something, and it’s always something bad. At the same time, a collective personality having been established—the desire for world domination and control of international finance at its center—it is also read backward onto individuals, so that for the anti-Semite every Jew is potentially both a bearer of the group character and a part of the conspiracy.

But precisely because that is the nature of classical anti-Semitism, we also have to insist that not every reference to a Jew or to Jews is by that token anti-Semitic; to be unable to distinguish ordinary political discourse from hate-mongering is to be willfully obtuse. Congressman Moran’s assertion about “the Jewish community” helps to make the distinction clear. Even devoid of hate-mongering (and followed by a sincere apology), this is a recognizable case of garden-variety anti-Semitism. Some Jews become all Jews, and their allegedly collective desire alchemically transmutes into domination of an entire nation’s policies—even though public opinion polls show support for the war to be the same or weaker among Jews than among the population as a whole (as Moran himself acknowledged in his apology).

At the same time, it is not anti-Semitic to say, as Moran perhaps intended to say and as is often said on the left, that “the Jewish lobby is one of the biggest obstacles to a rational American Middle East policy.” That statement is arguable, and hyperbolic, but at the same time perfectly reasonable in its broad outline—reasonable judgments are often arguable or hyperbolic. The main point is that there undeniably is a pro-Israel lobby in Washington composed in great part of the representatives of several major Jewish organizations, and if those organizations had their way American policy would always tilt unequivocally toward Israel: just as if the Irish political elite in Massachusetts had had their way policy would for many years have tilted toward Irish Republicanism; or would have tilted toward Mussolini in the 1930s if the major Italian-American organizations had had their way. As Michael Kinsley pointed out in *Slate*, one of the strongest claims ever made for the power of this lobby can be found on the website of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

But even this bit of self-inflation does not convict AIPAC’s members of “dual loyalty,” a charge that is still more likely to be raised by nationalists of the right, such as Buchanan, than by internationalists (or antinationalists) of the left. Ethnic identification with the homeland has always been central to American life, and

has often had significant political consequences; any American history textbook that didn’t mention it would have to be scrapped. When someone is Jewish, and acts upon the assumption that being Jewish carries with it certain interests and an obligation to defend those interests (as in the defense of Israel), the identification is not only relevant but even called for. This is especially true for those many Jews who feel that organizations like AIPAC do not speak for them, and thus choose to raise the specter of “the Jewish lobby” in order to critique it. One might avoid any implication of stereotyping to say, euphemistically, “the pro-Israel lobby in Washington,” but it would also be pointless and obfuscatory.

In American politics, “Jewish” has a concrete, identifiable meaning, as any Democratic or Republican activist could tell us. It is only in extensions of this commonplace observation, such as Buchanan’s hint of the ancient blood libel, or his and LaRouche’s traditional and inflammatory anti-

It is not anti-Semitic to say that ‘the Jewish lobby is one of the biggest obstacles to a rational American Middle East policy.’

Semitic language of “cabal” or “nest”; or Congressman Moran’s initial failure to acknowledge that Jews are as diverse a group as any other; or Councilman Jackson’s implication (“a home away from home”) that dual loyalty has become disloyalty, that a line that ought to be drawn is clearly crossed over.

A fair-minded person, in short, looks for explanations of phenomena; the racist “explains” them by attaching them to his favorite race. So to “explain” American policy solely as the result of machinations of “the Jewish lobby,” without mentioning oil, water, or expansionism; or the interests of the military-industrial sector; or the electoral and ideological utility of substituting guns for butter; or the way in which permanent crisis serves the interests of the Republican Party, is indeed to engage in anti-Semitism. Conversely, it is misleading to mention all those factors and then, for fear of appearing anti-Semitic, omit all mention of “the Jewish lobby” or of the right-wing ideologues, who are also strong supporters of Israel, in key policy-making positions in the Bush Administration.

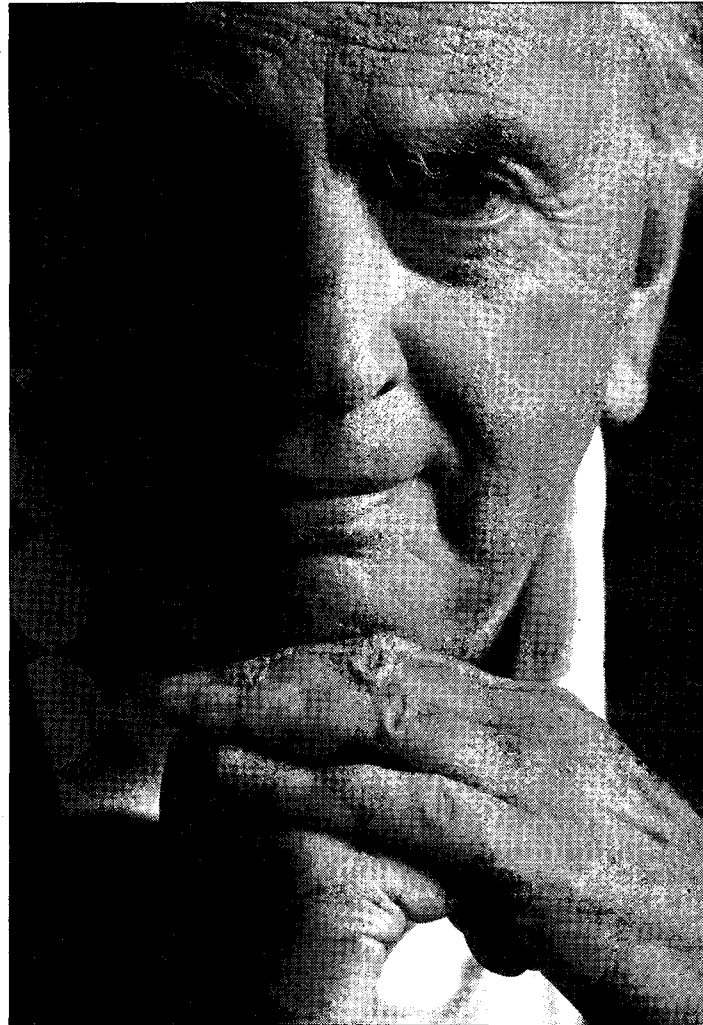
On the face of it, however, none of this has anything to do with the specifically anti-Israel sentiments that are indeed shared by many people on “the left,” or in the antiwar movement. Therefore, when Michael Lerner alleges that the left engages in both “anti-Semitism” and “Israel-bashing,” one looks for some examples of the former, let alone for any notable exemplars of it on “the left,” considering that many of its most prominent voices signed an open letter opposing Lerner’s exclusion from the rally. But one looks in vain. It may indeed be true—though how will we ever know?—that the San Francisco coalition would, as Lerner also suggested, have bent over backward not to exclude a black or gay person who wanted to speak, and yet was willing to exclude a Jew. But then the strength of this argument, if it has any, rests on the fact that in the United States people of color and gays can still quite reasonably claim the status of victimhood, with all that entails in our victim-conscious society; and Jews no longer can, to nearly the same extent. It should make Jews very happy, after all, that a “gentleman’s agreement” among real estate agents or a redlined mortgage application will hardly ever be applied to them today, and that Jews as such are unlikely to be discriminated

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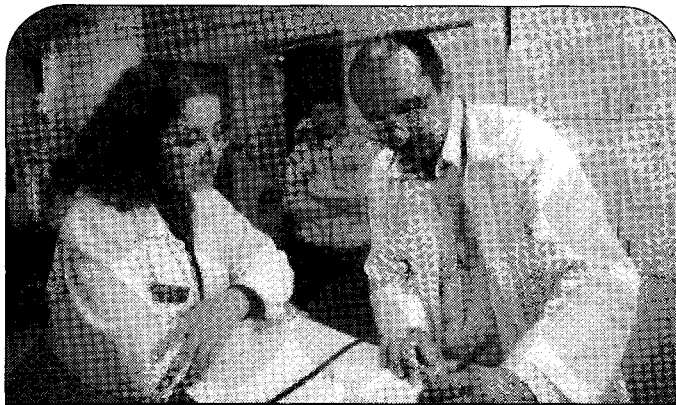
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against in the courts, or to be beaten up as "Christ killers." There is still more than enough anti-Semitic attitude around; and it may still, all in all, be historically insensitive for non-Jews, having welcomed Jews into the club, to assume that they can now be insulted as freely as anyone else; but it is not anti-Semitic. In any event, Lerner's case fell apart when subsequent reports satisfactorily established that he was excluded not because he's Jewish or a Zionist—there were, it turns out, already two rabbis with similar politics on the program—but because the rule about not having speakers who had publicly criticized sponsoring organizations had been put in place well before his name even came up.

Having been offered no evidence for the charge of anti-Semitism, then, we return to the original question of the relationship, if any, between anti-Semitism and "Israel-bashing," the only genuine point of departure for the right's (and Lerner's) imputation of "left-wing anti-Semitism." Certain things are obvious. Israel is a Jewish state. This is not a matter of controversy or denigration, but of proud self-assertion. It is a state to which Jews anywhere in the world have an unalloyed "right of return"; it is a state in which, at least in practice, Jews and only Jews are first-class citizens; it is a state governed almost entirely by Jews, in which every government in recent memory has included at least one explicitly Jewish party. The point is not that Israel should be criticized because of these facts but rather that one can't criticize anything about Israel without criticizing Jews. But then the crucial question becomes: Is a state or its policies above criticism merely because it or they are composed of or made by Jews?

The clear answer that the left's ideological enemies want to give to this question is yes: If you criticize Israel, you're criticizing Jews, and therefore you're an anti-Semite. That thousands of those critics, including many of the most distinguished (Noam Chomsky, for example) are Jews themselves doesn't bother the right-wing polemicists, who know they can always count on some conservative Jewish ally to talk about "Jewish self-hatred," a self-serving ideological concept without any clinical content at all, akin to the infuriating psychiatric notion that if you disagree with the analyst's interpretation of your motives you're merely displaying "resistance." We can just as properly assert the contrary position, as the historian Eric Hobsbawm has done. He argues that the achievement of political rationality begins at home, so the first duty of a Scots intellectual is to oppose Scottish nationalism and the first duty of a Jewish intellectual is to oppose Jewish nationalism; just as, some of us might add, the first duty of a Jewish-American intellectual is to oppose American nationalism—or both nationalisms, for those who identify equally strongly as American and Jewish.

If we consider the practical effect of these two positions, the simple nationalistic equation of "Israel" and "Jewish" has a lot to answer for. To the extent that self-anointed Jewish spokespersons, with the opportunistic assistance of the right, have worked to make Israel and Jewishness synonymous, it is they—and not the left—who have sown the dangerous seed of new waves of anti-Semitism. This is all too clear in Europe today, where the nationalist, ideological equation has helped to inflame the Arab youth who commit most of the anti-Semitic outrages attributed by American propagandists to "the French"—among whom, contrarily, it is chiefly the student left who participate in marches

against anti-Semitism. On the other hand, the anti-Semite Jean-Marie Le Pen actually sympathizes with Israel against its Arab enemies, not only because the latter are the more aggressive intruder into his version of a purified "nation" but also because in institutionalized Zionism he recognizes and appreciates a good, traditional European-style nationalism when he sees it.

The sad truth, in other words, is that since the foundation of the State of Israel, Jews can no longer claim to be the "Jewish nation," wandering helplessly across the diaspora in search of a home. We—that is, those among us who want it—have a home now; but that home turned out to be a nation-state, and a state is just a state, founded (as most are) in violence, monopolizing (as all do) the means of repression. It is not a moral entity, but just an institutional means of organizing some people in a geographical area and excluding others, by force if necessary. Nationalism, be it that of Irish Republicans or Anglo-Protestants, Israelis or Palestinians, is no better or worse than the actions committed in its name; no nation-state is better or worse than what it does to its own inhabitants, or in the world at large. In the case of Israel, as long as there are Palestinians clamoring to be allowed to return as full-class citizens to their (or their ancestors') homeland, and being denied that possibility, and killed in large numbers because they refuse to accept that denial, then their dispossession will be a constant and embittering source of enmity for Israel among those who sympathize with them. That Zionists insist that the land of Israel is actually their historical homeland changes nothing; in the eyes of a disinterested observer, dispossession remains dispossession, no matter what the excuse for it.

Is there not, though, a double standard operating here? Palestinians kill innocent people in the name of their nationhood, and seem to retain worldwide sympathy; when Israelis kill innocent people, they incur moral condemnation. In large part, this is because of the logic of the moral equation I've just described. Palestinians lost a home; Jews gained a state. By and large, people give more sympathy to the homeless than they do to states, especially when representatives of the state that expelled them from their homes now talk recklessly of achieving ethnic cleansing by making the expulsion total and permanent. But there is an even more critical factor operating against Israel as well, at least on the left—and here we come to the crux of the matter.

It is often said, angrily and truly, that Israel seems to occupy an exceptional place on the left's political hit list: Where is the critique of the Russians in Chechnya, of Turkey in Kurdistan, of China in Tibet? Actually, there has at times been quite a bit of such critique on the left, not to mention of Saddam Hussein himself. However, it does not seem of major relevance at a moment when the issue for Americans is the brutally one-sided assault we are witnessing in Iraq; and when even some of that assault's strongest supporters admit that it cannot achieve its purported aim—to bring "peace" and "democracy" to the Middle East—unless a mutually acceptable settlement on Palestinian rights is achieved first. Thus if there is a double standard here, Israel is not its primary object.

The truth is that the primary element in almost all left foreign-policy positions today is, and long has been, opposition to American imperialism. No doubt, this opposition has sometimes led elements of the left to romanticize the Third World and to excul-

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pate its grossest tyrants, including those in Arab states. Such bending over backward to support any and all opponents or victims of the United States is a political and moral error, but again, it has nothing to do with anti-Semitism or "Israel-bashing." Whatever critique we ought to make of tyrants such as Saddam Hussein or opportunists such as Yasir Arafat, it remains the case that Israel is both the chief benefactor of American imperialism and its most visible outpost—our "most-favored nation." Israel's treatment of the Palestinians takes place under the umbrella of American protection, with arms paid for or supplied by the United States, with the unquestioning support of both major political parties. And more than any other nation today—unless one counts Tony Blair as a nation—it has hitched itself to the bandwagon of American belligerency.

These two conditions—the asymmetrical moral equation and the relationship of Israel to the United States—are what left-wing "Israel-bashing" is all about; they explain its occurrence satisfactorily. That is not to say that they excuse it; an explanation is not necessarily an excuse. For despite my earlier reference to the acceptance of Jews in the contemporary United States, there is still a terrible subtext here. Though Zionism originated as a response to nineteenth-century European anti-Semitism, it was finally given its material basis by the Holocaust. The State of Israel was thus born out of a terror at least as great as any people has ever had to undergo, and so the hideously destructive conflict between Palestinians and Jews over one of the smaller pieces of politically bounded land on the planet is one of the great histor-

ical tragedies of all time. Critics of Israel (I include myself among them) too often fail to see this tragic dimension; too often are capable of coldly forgetting, or seeming to disdain, this history when uttering our criticisms, or treating all of Israel as though it consisted of nothing but followers of Ariel Sharon. This constitutes a failure of human sympathy, though the failure is in no way idiosyncratic. Left, center—and nowadays especially right—people who are in the grip of ideological rigidity regularly forget the humanity of their opponents and view innocent people as only "collateral damage" arising from some policy or other. In the case of American policy-makers today, this is not an exception but the absolute core of their doctrine. As a member in good standing of the left, however, I like to think that we could do better than that.

But as for the political content of the criticism of Israel, finally, no invocation of anti-Semitism is necessary to explain the intellectual and emotional outcome of the obvious facts I have stated. Left spokespersons, including Jews, say what they mean, and they hardly ever say "Jews" when they mean "Israel" or "the Israeli government." We do not think political attacks on France imply hatred of French people, or that attacks on the "axis of evil" imply hatred of Iranians, Iraqis and Koreans. Only with "Israel" and "Jews" is this crude equation being made, and it is not being made by Israel's critics, or even Israel's haters; it is being made by its apologists. It is a shame that in his understandable anger Michael Lerner, who is not one of those apologists, should have lent his voice, if only momentarily, to the blowhards and bullies of the right. ■

Letter From Belgrade

by Brian Whitmore

Belgrade, Serbia-Montenegro

Ari Fleischer's timing couldn't have been worse. Attempting to justify Washington's plans to invade Iraq without United Nations approval, the White House spokesman held up Serbia as a bright, shining example of successful US-sponsored regime change, arguing that NATO's 1999 bombing campaign weakened Slobodan Milosevic and hastened his fall from power. "I suppose he might still be there had it not been for NATO and the United States," Fleischer told reporters in Washington on March 10. "That was regime change in Serbia, wasn't it?"

Two days later in downtown Belgrade, the old regime bit back. Serbia's prime minister, Zoran Djindjic, the darling of the West and the man who had engineered Milosevic's ouster in October 2000, hobbled out of an armored limousine near his government's headquarters on the afternoon of March 12. On crutches and suffering from a broken tendon from a soccer injury, he was moving slowly. Barely out of his car, he was gunned down by a sniper with a high-powered rifle and died almost instantly.

Brian Whitmore covers Eastern Europe and the Balkans for the Boston Globe.



The slaying, which officials here blamed on shady underworld and paramilitary groups tied to the Milosevic regime, dashed Serbs' hopes for their fragile and fledgling democracy and sparked fears of renewed chaos in this deeply troubled Balkan nation. And with Serbia languishing under a state of emergency and police hunting down gangsters with nicknames like the Godfather, the Idiot, the Rat and Bugsy, it also provided a cautionary lesson about the limits of regime change as Iraqis toppled statues of Saddam Hussein: Decapitating a brutal dictatorship does not a stable democracy make. At the very least, what is needed, but rarely happens, is a wholesale flushing out of the official and unofficial apparatus that keep dictators in power.

Regimes like Milosevic's and Hussein's are propped up not only by official state institutions but also by sprawling and overlapping matrixes of underworld criminal groups, shadowy commercial clans and quasi-legal paramilitary units. International sanctions and embargoes like those imposed on Serbia and Iraq tend to strengthen these elements, which are adept at the smuggling and subterfuge necessary to keep the economy puttering along. When such regimes fall, these hidden pillars of support—flush with cash, resources, muscle and firepower—maintain

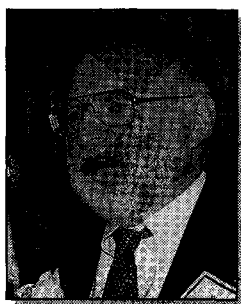
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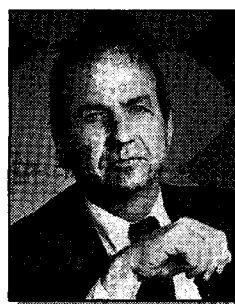
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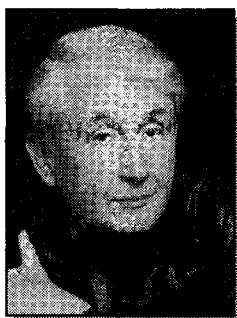
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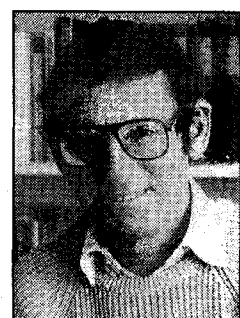
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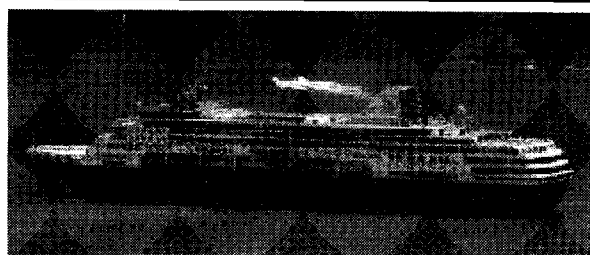


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their power and influence. With civil society decimated and the economy devastated, they are usually the most powerful constituency around.

And this leaves the regime changers with a dilemma and a paradox. Directly taking on the hidden power structures runs the risk of renewed bloodshed and chaos. But cutting deals and co-opting these forces, as Washington did in Afghanistan and has suggested it will try to do in Iraq, allows hidden elements of the old regime to keep their power and pursue their own agendas. "The lesson of the last three years is that if a dictator disappears it is not the end of the job," Maurizio Massari, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's ambassador to Serbia-Montenegro, told me shortly after the assassination. "Regime change should not be confused with dictator change," Massari added. "Removing a dictator is a necessary but not sufficient condition for changing a regime."

Serbia's real revolution was not televised. As scenes of the massive street protests that brought down Milosevic were beamed around a captivated world in October 2000, the decisive blow to his regime actually took place away from the television cameras, in a Mercedes SUV cruising Belgrade's back streets on the eve of the largest demonstrations. In the back seat were Djindjic and a man called Milorad Lukovic, who goes by the moniker Legija, or "The Legionnaire," because he once served in the French Foreign Legion. One of the most feared men in town, Lukovic commanded Milosevic's Special Operations Unit, known as the Red Berets, a secret paramilitary police division that was engaged in some of the bloodiest and most brutal ethnic cleansing campaigns in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo.

A reputed heroin smuggler, Lukovic also had ties to, and would later lead, an underworld group called the Zemun Clan, named for the Belgrade suburb where it is based. Such criminal and paramilitary groups were part of a larger network of shady underground structures set up by Milosevic to fight his wars. They financed themselves through drug smuggling, prostitution and human trafficking. "This was part of a parallel military structure that Milosevic set up to do his dirty work," said James Lyon, director of the Belgrade office of the International Crisis

Group, a Brussels-based think tank. "They weren't just involved in ethnic cleansing, they were also busy looting, pillaging and running criminal rackets," Lyon added. "There is a nexus here between organized crime, the police, the secret services and war criminals. Often you find that these are all one and the same."

Milosevic had ordered Lukovic to have his forces fire on the pro-democracy demonstrators who were swarming Belgrade's streets and squares. Djindjic persuaded the Red Beret leader not to do so, convincing him that Milosevic was finished and that he could get a better deal under a new government. "The hidden power structures in Serbia understood that they could not go any further with Milosevic, so they gave him up, but they wanted certain pay-offs," said Bratislav Grubacic, a Belgrade-based political analyst.

At first, Djindjic and Serbia's new leaders accommodated them. Lukovic's cohorts were integrated into the country's police and security forces, a wholesale purge of the judiciary, military and law-enforcement bodies was deferred, and the authorities turned a blind eye while organized crime groups like the Zemun Clan continued doing what they do best. But the new government soon realized that Serbia would stay an international pariah, elected officials would not really govern the country and the economy would remain a basket case as long

as Lukovic and other underworld leaders kept their influence. So Djindjic and his team decided to declare war, at first covertly but later openly, on organized crime.

Djindjic's government first tried to play Belgrade's top two organized crime syndicates, the Zemun and Surcin clans, against each other. The government also began hitting various underworld targets with raids against drug rings and human traffickers, as well as rooting out some remnants of the old regime from law-enforcement bodies. Cooperating with the international criminal tribunal in The Hague reinforced this effort, since many suspected war criminals are also underworld bosses. But it also carried enormous political risks, since many here view the tribunal as anti-Serb.

Under pressure from the United States, Milosevic was arrested in April 2001 and extradited to The Hague to stand trial for war crimes two months later. Assuming he and his men were safe, Lukovic acquiesced in the move. But the tribunal soon turned its attention to Lukovic and other Red Berets. Seeing an opportunity to please Western donors and rid himself of his political rivals, Djindjic made it clear he would cooperate.

In January Lukovic sent an open letter to Serbian newspapers accusing Djindjic of being "dangerously unpatriotic" and warning him that his days were numbered. "You are muddying the true patriots [and] spending the last credits of people's patience," the letter read. "Your last days are being counted." In February, a reputed Zemun Clan gangster named Dejan Milenkovic—alias "Bugsy"—rammed a truck into the prime minister's car, which was traveling in a government motorcade. A sniper was waiting in a nearby highrise apartment building for Djindjic to get out of his car, but the prime minister's bodyguards made sure he stayed put. Bugsy was briefly detained after the incident, but, amazingly, was released and has since disappeared.

The first attempt on Djindjic's life came two days after a

Removing a dictator is a necessary but not sufficient condition for changing a regime.'

—European official Maurizio Massari

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failed attempt to arrest Veselin Sljivancanin, indicted by the Hague tribunal for atrocities committed in Croatia, particularly the massacre of civilians at Vukovar, in the early 1990s. "The Djindjic assassination shows how little progress Serbia has made in dismantling the Milosevic-era structures of power and breaking with the past," said Lyon of the International Crisis Group. "It also shows the dangers faced by reformers who attempt to dismantle these structures."

On March 12, the day Djindjic was killed, his government was planning to issue arrest warrants for several top underworld figures, including Lukovic. Many here described the assassination as nothing short of an attempted coup by remnants of the old regime, and warn that a similar fate could just as easily await Iraq's new rulers in due time. "The hidden power structures that will eventually give up Saddam will continue to have money and power, and will later form the opposition to the new regime," Grubacic said. "It won't be easy with them."

Officials have become fond of referring to Djindjic as "Serbia's John F. Kennedy," and on the night of his funeral, a Belgrade television station showed Oliver Stone's controversial film *JFK*. The message and the symbolism from the film—that the Djindjic assassination was orchestrated by a cabal of crime bosses and state security officials—were lost on nobody.

At first glance, it appears that Djindjic's allies in the government, sensing that "it is us or them," seem to have taken the gloves off in pursuit of the prime minister's killers. More than 7,000 people have been detained, and more than 2,000, including the alleged triggerman, remain in custody. Businesses fronting for the Zemun Clan have been bulldozed, and high-profile Milosevic-era officials have been arrested. Among those detained were two former security aides to Vojislav Kostunica, a former

ally of Djindjic's who replaced Milosevic as Yugoslav president in October 2000 but stepped down this past February, when Yugoslavia was dissolved. (A moderate nationalist, Kostunica was an ally of Djindjic's in the anti-Milosevic opposition, but the two later fell out over the pace of reform and whether to extradite war-crimes suspects to The Hague. Kostunica twice failed to win election to Serbia's presidency.) The new prime minister, Zoran Djindjic, has also pledged greater cooperation with the Hague tribunal, including a promise to hunt down the notorious Ratko Mladic, wanted for the 1995 massacre of some 8,000 men and boys at Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, Lukovic, the assassination plot's alleged mastermind, remains at large.

Many here argue that the Djindjic assassination could be the catalyst that finally pushes Serbia to face its bloody recent past, purge remnants of the old regime and institute genuine democratic reforms. Perhaps, but huge obstacles remain, and it is unclear whether the government has the stomach to surmount them. The country's law-enforcement establishment, judiciary and military remain infiltrated with Milosevic holdovers and Lukovic cronies. Nationalism and xenophobia remain prevalent, and many Serbs continue to view the West with suspicion. On the day of Djindjic's funeral, groups of men on Belgrade's main pedestrian mall hawked T-shirts with pictures of Mladic and Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, also indicted for the Srebrenica massacre, reading "Serb Heroes."

As soldiers in camouflage with AK-47 assault rifles patrol the streets, the yawning gap between the soaring hopes of Serbia's "October Revolution" and today's gloomy reality should temper any expectations that democracy will flourish in Iraq, or elsewhere in the Middle East, after Saddam Hussein is gone. With enough firepower, any disciplined and well-trained army can depose a dictator. But changing a regime is another matter entirely. ■

LETTERS

C O N T I N U E D

(Continued From Page 2)

has disappeared. The Democratic coalition that produced it was smashed by the Reagan Administration with the tactic of shouting "handout" at any form of public assistance or funding, unless it was for the military or local pork. Instead of seeing poverty as a structural problem, we have lapsed into the nineteenth-century habit of labeling the poor "lazy," the cause of their own destitution. In the meantime, Wal-Mart has replaced GM as America's largest company, with a precipitous drop in wages and opportunity. And to all this, the baby boomers, my generation, have shown their most identifiable quality: indifference. Let's hope that more of us can come to see poverty through the realistic and sympathetic eyes of Jack Newfield.

MARC A. CIRIGLIANO

New York City

■ No one can be content with the level of poverty in New York City or in our country. But an accurate picture of "how the other half lives" should not be drawn merely from anecdotal

material, even if gathered by a reporter as practiced as Jack Newfield. The fact is that under New York's governor, there is good news for low-income workers. For example, according to Census data, for children living with single mothers, the reduction in poverty in New York since 1995 was almost three times the reduction of the economic expansion of the 1980s.

The same source reveals that in New York, work rates for single parents rose 38 percent in the period following welfare reform—four times the increase of the economic expansion of the 1980s. In 1994 New York invested \$77 million in the earned-income tax credit. Now, thanks to the steadfast support of George Pataki, we invest \$550 million, a 543 percent increase. The combined federal and state EITC can add up to \$5,000 to the annual income of poor working families. Newfield's silence on the EITC is puzzling, as is his silence on the significant increase since 1995 in health insurance coverage for low-income New Yorkers and the tripling of childcare subsidies.

The facts indicate that Governor Pataki has been "locating the frontier of the possible" in

his strategy for shrinking poverty—a strategy that provides solid dollars-and-cents help for low-income working families. *The Nation* ought to tell the full story. BRIAN J. WING

Commissioner, New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

REVENGE OF THE DITTO-HEADS

■ Michael Massing, in "The Doha Folies" [April 21], repeated reporter Michael Wolff's claim that Rush Limbaugh played a tape of Wolff and gave out his e-mail address on the air, resulting in the jamming of his inbox with thousands of e-mails. Limbaugh protests that he did not broadcast the address on air. While that may be true, Wolff insists he saw his URL posted on the Limbaugh website and that of the e-mails he read, "hundreds referred to getting the address from Rush."

JACQUES WAVES

■ In "USA Oui! Bush Non!" [Feb. 10] Jacques Rupnik was inaccurately described as a former adviser to Jacques Chirac.

(Continued From Page 7)

professor William Miller told the *New York Times*, "something's not right. The democracy, the risks and benefits, simply have to be better distributed."

A dynamic and democratic view of merit in higher education admissions assures access to blacks and Latinos to selective public colleges and law schools, trains potential leaders to serve all segments of the society and legitimizes our democracy. The military brief cites the chasm between the racial composition of officers and enlisted soldiers as a "blaring wakeup call" that racial diversity is "critical" to "our national security." The democratic stakes in the Michigan cases are just as high. LANI GUINIER

Lani Guinier is Bennett Boskey Professor of Law at Harvard Law School and co-author of *The Miner's Canary* (Harvard).

Daily Show Does Bush



The TV anchor was taken aback. Unlike the other network news anchors or the *New York Times*, he considered the disclosure that the Bush Administration had granted a major contract to Halliburton for post-war construction of oil wells in Iraq to be a scandalous lead story. He noted that hearing the news "does make me feel like the government just took a [bleep] on my chest." He then turned to his "senior" senior correspondent, Stephen Colbert, and asked what he made of the Halliburton deal. "Keeping in mind that Halliburton was a major contributor to the Republican campaign and that Vice President Cheney is its former CEO, this move by the government is extremely..." and then Colbert paused. "Unpleasant?" offered the anchor, "nauseating?" Colbert said that nothing quite captured it; what came closest was a German word he translated to mean "to throw one's hands up in mute horror and in this state of paralyzing dread to realize that those you need to trust most have instead confirmed your darkest fears." But Colbert said even that "seems a little namby-pamby in this context."

Welcome to *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central, the medically prescribed antidote to CNN and Fox. Hosted by Jon Stewart since 1999, this parody of the news is dedicated to expressing utter incredulity over what Team Bush tries to get away with week in and week out. As of this spring, a weekly compilation of the show airs on CNN International, which boasts 160 million viewers. The show has won kudos in Australia, Canada and Britain, where one reporter wrote, "It is difficult to believe that they have actually let him on air." Stewart's on-air persona is that of the outraged individual who, comparing official pronouncements with his own basic common sense, simply cannot believe what he—and all of us—are expected to swallow. The approach of Stewart and his "reporters" is not to attack Bush policies as ideologically problematic; instead, they expose them as utterly absurd, as nonsense, deranged. When Rumsfeld issued his warning to Syria and Iran that the United States would hold them accountable if they interfered in any way in the invasion of Iraq, Stewart asked in barely restrained mock horror, "Do you see what he just did there? He's starting another war." Central to the show's sensibil-

ities, and to its success, is Stewart's insistence that the news generated by Team Bush be treated on its own terms, not as news at all but as fatuous PR, ludicrously out of touch with reality.

Because Stewart is a comic and not a politician, one would expect that he would skewer Al Gore, were he President, with comparable glee. He has, for example, blasted Tom Daschle's criticism of the war by reminding viewers that Daschle voted for the war. Indeed, Stewart told the London *Guardian* that the show is neither Democratic nor Republican but simply seeks to represent the "politically disappointed." His special target is spin: "We're out to stop that political trend of repeating things again and again until people are forced to believe them." Nonetheless, he has consistently opposed the war, even in his more sober interviews with guests like the prowar comic and *Saturday Night Live* alum Dennis Miller.

Unlike other late-night comedy shows, which safely go for cheap laughs by dissing Saddam, *The Daily Show* has recaptured the pre-9/11 sensibilities that prevailed about Team Bush before the attacks encased him in Teflon. The studio audience howls and applauds in delight at Stewart's irreverence. Its core audience (73 percent) is the coveted 18-to-49 demographic. And here's some cheering news: More people (4 million) tune in to *The Daily Show* in a given week than watched Fox news at the height of the war (3.3 million).

Stewart has a keen eye for Bush's hypocrisies. After Baghdad had fallen, he showed excerpts of Bush's television address to the Iraqi people. "You are a good and gifted people," the President intoned unctuously. "You deserve better than tyranny and corruption and torture chambers." Stewart, sticking out a cocked forefinger as if he were chucking a toddler under the chin, cooed in a high voice, "Yes you do, yes you do, you're a very good country, ga, ga, ga, goo goo."

As part of his assault on the triumph of right-wing PR, Stewart reserves special derision for Fox News. After making fun of Iraqi state TV as a mere government mouthpiece, Stewart asked, "Imagine a government that has an entire TV station to lay out its agenda." He then aired Fox footage, after which he appeared to be hypnotized, chanting, "Must support war, tax cut good." In another show, he noted, "This war has truly belonged to Fox. Not only did they start it...they managed to offer fair and balanced coverage." We then saw Fox footage of a soldier saying hi to his family and closing with, "You're watching Fox News." Stewart couldn't believe it: "They've got soldiers doing station IDs!" He then played a montage Fox aired of the "sights and sounds...of operation Iraqi Freedom," which showed massive bombs exploding in Baghdad accompanied by appallingly sentimental New Age piano music. "That was real," Stewart confirmed in disbelief. "Sounds like our troops have liberated a Yanni concert."

Yes, it is important to itemize, carefully and seriously, all the reasons Team Bush is lethally dangerous to all except the upper echelons of the Fortune 500. But *The Daily Show* reminds us that ridicule, scorn and laughter may be some of the most effective weapons of all.

SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

Susan J. Douglas is a professor of communications studies at the University of Michigan.

BOOKS & THE ARTS

The Anatomy Lesson

ARTHUR C. DANTO

For Art Winslow

Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* cycle consists of five thematically interrelated films, much as Wagner's *Ring* cycle is made up of four distinct but narratively interlinked operas. But Barney has also designed a number of sculptural objects for the work's elaborate *mise en scène*, and it is these that make up the bulk of the exhibition to which the Guggenheim Museum in New York has been given over nearly in its entirety until June 11. Moreover, the museum is internally related to the work, not only because a substantial sequence in one of the films uses its interior space as a setting but because a symbolic correspondence is supposed to exist between the five films and the five ascending curves of the museum's helical architecture. The objects displayed on each of the museum's ramps were in effect props in the corresponding film. Not only do these objects derive their meaning from the films, but the order in which they are experienced, as one ascends from ramp to ramp, reflects the overall narrative of the work.

Wagner designed the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth as the canonical theater for presenting his *oeuvre*, and it is widely appreciated that seeing the *Ring* cycle performed in Bayreuth is a unique and indispensable part of experiencing it. The Guggenheim was of course designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, but Barney has exploited and modified its architecture for the key episode of the work as a whole. So unlike the Festspielhaus, which is not part of the *Ring*'s narrative, the Guggenheim really is part of *Cremaster*'s. This has given Barney's many European enthusiasts a special reason to make a pilgrimage to New York, even if they may already have seen the exhibition in Cologne or Paris, for only here will they have been able to experience the Guggenheim as a work of installation art that belongs to the *Cremaster* endeavor. This makes it, by general consent, far and away the most impressive of the three venues. The question for Barney's admirers, expressed by one of my Northern European

correspondents, is whether Matthew Barney is the Picasso of our time, or the Leonardo.

I think it enough that he should be the Matthew Barney of the present age, using artistic resources that would have been unavailable to his predecessors, as well as a conception of visual art that is entirely of our time. *Cremaster* is a contemporary *Gesamtkunstwerk* that uses performance

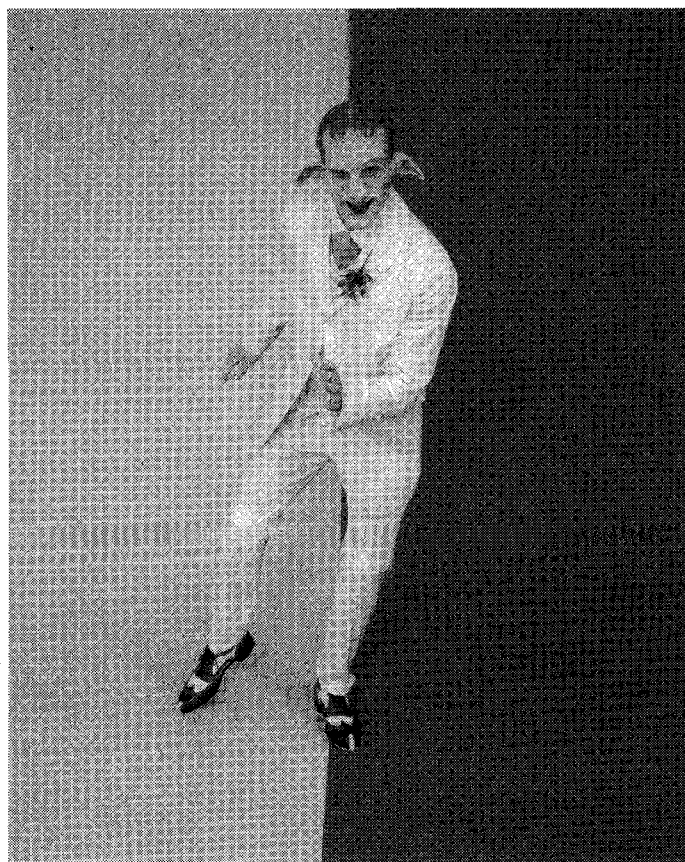


PHOTO BY MICHAEL JAMES O'BRIEN © MATTHEW BARNEY. COURTESY BARBARA GLADSTONE

art, music, film, dance, installation, sculpture and photography. Barney himself is the work's author and dramaturge, as well as an actor in possession of the exceptional athletic powers his successive roles demand. And his art embodies preoccupations that are distinctive to our era. In *Cremaster*, these have largely to do with issues of what one might call the metaphysics of gender, and the use of the term

"cremaster" implies as much. The term has existed in English since the seventeenth century, almost exclusively as part of the descriptive anatomy of the male reproductive system: It refers in its primary sense to the muscle of the spermatic cord by which the testes are suspended in the scrotum. But Barney has given it a somewhat allegorical spin, in much the way, I suppose, that Descartes did with the pineal gland, which, because it is situated between the hemispheres of the brain, impressed him as being the seat of the soul. No one to this day quite understands the pineal gland's function, but the cremaster is associated with the descent of the testes into the scrotum in the seventh month after conception, at which point the gender of the fetus is definitively male.

There is a point in embryonic development when matters are less clear-cut. Two genital swellings known as labioscrotal separate, in the female, to become the labia majora, and in the male unite to form the scrotum. But in the labioscrotal phase of our development, we are male and female at once, so to speak, and this condition of gender indeterminacy speaks with particular eloquence to a generation that, especially under the influence of feminist theory, postulates a condition beyond the male-female disjunction. After sexual differentiation is established, the chief function of the cremaster is to raise the testes when the scrotum is chilled.

Why Barney should have singled out this particular muscle, rather than the spermatic cord or, for that matter, the testes themselves, is doubtless connected with the poetics of ascent and descent, which figure as metaphorical actions in the four *Cremaster* films in which Barney himself performs. He does not appear in *Cremaster 1*, in which two Goodyear blimps may be taken as symbolic embodiments of the genital swellings of the labioscrotal moment of our sexual development. In *Cremaster 3*, the character played by Barney climbs up and down an elevator shaft in the Chrysler Building; in *Cremaster 5*, he climbs around the proscenium arch in the Opera House in Budapest; and in *Cremaster 4*, the character burrows through an underground channel fraught with symbolic meaning.

The spiraling interior architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim lends itself to ascent and descent, and becomes a second site for the character's upward itinerary in *Cremaster 3*. Because of its role in the *Cremaster* cycle, the building overcomes the commonplace distinction between exhibiting space and

exhibited content. But neither it nor the profusion of objects and images that make up the show as a whole can be grasped as art without reference to the films that are *Cremaster's* core. The Guggenheim accordingly holds daily screenings of its various parts in its Peter Lewis Auditorium, and on each Friday, those with the required stamina can see the work in its entirety. It is a remarkable experience, and a remarkable if not altogether successful work. I have to say that I lost patience with *Cremaster 3*, the last installment of the cycle to have been made, and three grueling hours long. But I am haunted by certain of its sequences, even if I remain unclear what the point is of the ordeal that it, and the cycle as a whole, depict.

The films in the cycle, as a useful handout claims, "represent a condition of pure potentiality," by which I imagine is meant the labioscrotal phase of genital development, before we are definitively male or female. In fact, *Cremaster 1* glorifies femininity. It has two protagonists—a female performer and then a chorus of females who dance, so to speak, as one. The action is dreamlike, and it reminded me, as do many of the *Cremaster* sequences, of the Surrealist films of Maya Deren. The female heroine is situated under a table, laden with grapes, in the cabin of the blimp, seemingly guarded by women of an almost forbidding beauty, wearing smart military uniforms. She succeeds, after some effort, in making an opening in the cloth above her head, through which she pulls down clusters of the perhaps forbidden fruit. The performer's name is Marti Domination, a real personage, I discovered through the Internet, where she is identified as belonging to The House of Domination. And though Marti Domination looks thoroughly feminine, in a white intimate garment, high heels and an extravagant coiffure, the web page leaves the matter of her actual gender somewhat ambiguous. My sense is that Marti Domination portrays a woman, whatever the reality, and that the aura of sexual indeterminacy accounts in part for her having been cast in the role.

The action of *Cremaster 1* is split in two: As Marti Domination arranges the grapes in logographic patterns on the floor, the chorus executes isomorphic Busby Berkeley–like patterns in a football stadium on the ground below: The gridiron is covered in blue AstroTurf. Their movements are cadenced to swelling cascades of deliberately gorgeous music, as in a musical from the 1930s. There is an exalting moment when one of the

chorines—Marti Domination herself—runs across the field with two balloons, shaped like the Goodyear blimps. Not much else happens. The action goes back and forth between grapes and girls, cabin and football field, and then comes to an end. The entire review flirts outrageously with kitsch, which gives it, one might say, its authenticity.

If *Cremaster 1* is an ode to a certain idealized femininity—to beauty, music, dancing, fantastic gowns and pumps by Manolo Blahnik—*Cremaster 2* is a stylized ballad to violent masculinity. The hero is Gary Gilmore, portrayed by Barney wearing a full beard. Again, the action is dreamlike. The robbery and murder in the gas station (the Goodyear logo can be glimpsed through its window as the attendant, shot through the back of the head, bleeds to death on the floor) mainly unfurl in silence. The execution of Gilmore, wearing convict stripes, is symbolically enacted as a rodeo act—he dies subduing a bucking bull—and his afterlife is fantasized as a Texas two-step, danced by a cowboy and cowgirl. These images are poetic and powerful, as is the mysterious flashback scene near the end of the film, in which Gilmore's grandmother, as an Edwardian belle with an impossibly narrow waist, speaks in a vast exhibition hall of that era with Harry Houdini. In a brilliant piece of casting, Houdini is played by Norman Mailer, the author, not incidentally, of *The Executioner's Song*. Mailer-Houdini delivers a speech—a rare occurrence in the cycle—poetically describing his escape from the submerged box in which he has been chained. He tells how he becomes one with the lock, how "a real transformation takes place." Escape through transformation is somehow the motif of the entire work, though the nature of our captive condition naturally remains somewhat indeterminate.

Cremaster 2 is, in my view, the most fully realized of the five segments of the cycle. But I have to say that I found *Cremaster 3* a mess. Calvin Tomkins wrote in *The New Yorker* that "a film like this may be one that only a Dick Cheney could walk out on without a frisson of self-doubt," but that walking out should have occurred to him at all speaks volumes about the film's shortcomings. Nothing but a cold sense of duty was able to keep me in my seat. The film exemplifies the flaw of hubris it is intended to portray, but one cannot really believe that it is any the less a flaw if it was made intentionally boring and preposterous. It is not my re-

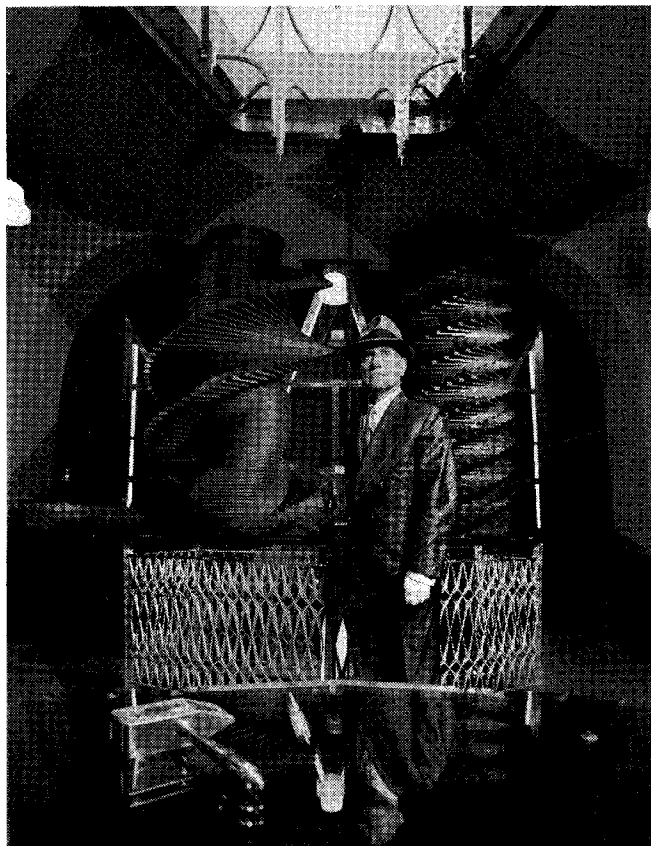
sponsibility to moralize, but my conjecture is that Barney has attained the kind of artistic eminence that makes those who work with him reluctant to be critical. If this should be true, then it is a good thing that *Cremaster 4* and *5* were made before hubris on this scale kicked in. *Cremaster 3* is not redeemed by its unquestioned high points, any more than *4* and *5* are seriously compromised by their ennui. It is a piece of bad art by a good and unquestionably important artist.

Disregarding *Cremaster 3*'s mythological prelude, the action of what one might consider its first act is split, somewhat like that of *Cremaster 1*, between two planes. On the upper plane—the suspended elevator cabin, the Cloud Club bar and indeed the glorious roof of the Chrysler Building—the performance is enacted by a single character, identified as the Entered Apprentice, played by Barney himself. On the lower plane—the Chrysler Building's elevator lobby—the performance is by a chorus of five 1967 Chrysler Crown Imperials, engaged in demolishing what I surmise is a vintage black Chrysler. The demolition derby goes on interminably as, with screeching tires, the five Imperials crash into their victim, go into reverse, and crash again, and again, and again, finally dragging or pushing the shattered heap from their midst. The prolonged mayhem alternates with the action on the higher plane, where the Entered Apprentice muddles through the process of mixing mortar, using the elegant Art Deco interior of one of the Chrysler Building's elevators as a vessel.

There is something wanton and willful about the way in which both enactments take place. I somehow feel that Barney, who seems to lack a real sense of humor, intended all this as some kind of comedy. As the Entered Apprentice, he is dressed in vintage 1930s working clothes, including a fedora, and wearing a small mustache. Perhaps he is supposed to be suggesting the ineptitude of the Chaplin character in *Modern Times*. The slapstick routine with the bartender in the Cloud Club, who improvises a stepstool to fetch a glass, only to bring a whole cupboard of glassware crashing on top of him as he falls to the floor, is roughly as

funny as the automobile massacre in the lobby below. The entire sequence is maelstromly inane.

The Guggenheim Museum is introduced as a symbolic setting in *Cremaster 3*, where the Entered Apprentice makes his graded way upward through a sequence of



Richard Serra as the Architect Hiram Abiff in *Cremaster 3*

degrees based on the rites of the Masonic Order. There is a genuine piece of wit in associating the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum with the legendary Temple of Solomon, which is an important mythic site on which Masonic rites and beliefs are based. My grandfather and father were dedicated Masons, so Masonic appurtenances—the compass and square, the trowel and the apron, not to mention references to initiations and sworn secrets—inflected the atmosphere of my childhood. Masonry really was their religion, but I could never bring myself to follow them, since even as a youth my temperament was too positivistic to believe in occult teaching of any sort. I nevertheless picked up a certain amount of Masonic lore, which helped somewhat to clarify what takes place at successive stages of the Guggenheim's inviolated ramp, as imaginatively transformed by Barney.

"Entered Apprentice" is a term in Masonic nomenclature, referring to the lowest degree in the Order. The highest stand-

ard degree is that of Master Mason. Masonic myth traces the origins of the fraternity to the Phoenician masons who worked on Solomon's Temple, as the Hebrews lacked the knowledge necessary to realize the king's architectural vision. The Master Mason was named Hiram Abiff, who possessed not merely the practical knowledge of shaping matter into usable forms but the greatest Masonic secret of all, the "ineffable name" of God. I know by hearsay of a ritual enactment in which various Hebrew ruffians try to wrest the knowledge, and hence the power, from Hiram Abiff, who was finally killed—or sacrificed—only to be resurrected by King Solomon himself, using the Masonic Grip.

Barney has cast the sculptor Richard Serra to play the part of the Master Mason, or Architect, whom the Entered Apprentice finally murders. The main action of the Guggenheim interlude, however, requires the Entering Apprentice to pass a series of tests, which must be done in the time it takes for melted Vaseline to spiral its way to the museum's lobby. The molten Vaseline is flung against the parapet by the Architect, which reenacts one of Serra's most famous sculptures, and indeed one of the signature works of the late

1960s. In 1969, Serra flung molten lead into the angle where wall and floor met in Leo Castelli's warehouse, using the architecture as a kind of ready-made mold. In a photograph of the time, Serra looks like a warrior hero, using the ladle as a weapon, and there is little question but that his act was perceived at the time as inaugurating a new moment in the history of sculpture. It is difficult not to see the demotion of lead to Vaseline as an emblematic degradation of that heroic moment to the present moment of postmodern art. The fact that the Entered Apprentice is himself killed in *Cremaster 3* is nevertheless a declaration that an artist of our day will achieve the status attained by Serra: Every member of the Masonic Order impersonates Hiram Abiff when initiated as a Master Mason. I have, meanwhile, nothing to say about the significance that Vaseline evidently has in Matthew Barney's vocabulary of symbols. Its cultural meaning is that of a lubricant, which can perhaps be connected to the two phallic columns

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erected by Hiram Abiff in the courtyard of the Temple. Someone once told me that in the night table next to his bed, all that was found after Auden's death was a large, economy-size jar of Vaseline and two pairs of castanets.

I must leave readers to their own resources in dealing with *Cremaster 4* and *5*. I think they are both quite magical. Barney is at his best in the role of The Candidate—a dandified tap-dancer, half man and half sheep, with red spit curls—in *Cremaster 4*, which takes place on the Isle of Man. The “Three Faeries”—personages of genuine sexual ambiguity who serve as benign intercessors—are among Barney's most compelling inventions. In both these films, I thought of *The Magic Flute*—especially so in *Cremaster 5*, in which Ursula Andress plays the role of “the Queen of Chain,” in the sequence that takes place in the Hungarian State Opera House in Budapest. As everyone knows, the narra-

tive of Mozart's masterpiece is also based on Masonic ritual. One cannot, meanwhile, praise too highly the musical scores for the whole cycle, composed by Jonathan Bepler.

Since objects and images relating to the different parts of the *Cremaster* cycle are arrayed on successive stages of the Guggenheim, the intention is that we shall imagine a mapping through which the exhibition replicates the cycle in another modality—in space, so to speak, in contrast with time. But the experience is totally different, and unless one has internalized the films and something of the ideas that animate them, what one encounters as one ascends or descends the ramp is more or less just art-stuff. It does not on its own make an enchanting show. But the cycle has moments of great enchantment. It is an uncertain achievement, but one with which everyone interested in contemporary art must deal. ■

Class Struggle

PETER SACKS

THE GATEKEEPERS: Inside the Admissions Process of a Premier College.

By Jacques Steinberg. Viking. 292 pp. \$25.95.

THE EARLY ADMISSIONS GAME: Joining the Elite.

By Christopher Avery, Andrew Fairbanks and Richard Zeckhauser. Harvard. 377 pp. \$29.95.

In a nation that nominally eschews class distinctions as unbefitting our supposed classlessness, whose elected officials decry any protest over government largesse to the rich as “class warfare,” real Americans—most of whom are suckers, it turns out—spend untold amounts of time, cash and effort obsessing on a tiny number of elite colleges that really, really don't want the vast majority of them as members.

Never mind, though. For an increasing number of baby boomer parents, it's never too early to stick kids on the Harvard-or-bust fast track. It starts with Mozart and Shakespeare in the crib, and then it's off to the \$8,000-a-year and up nursery school that admits toddlers on the basis of IQ tests (performance on which is heavily influenced by the educational attainment of the child's parents). The proper nursery school inexorably leads to the high-powered kindergarten and prep school and eventually

to thousands of dollars more in fees for college consultants and standardized testing tutors.

Before a child can say “meritocracy,” he or she is embarking on an overseas adventure to New Guinea that will lead, by design, to that killer college application essay that wows admissions counselors from Harvard, Yale or Princeton for its originality and sense of social and democratic purpose, a tonier version of the Miss America contestant's “I'm for world peace” speech.

If all the time and effort devoted to this enterprise were about a child's or young person's love of learning, creativity and personal development, I for one would be considerably less cynical. But the elite college admissions game—under the near-tyrannical guidance of *US News & World Report's* annual ranking of the nation's “best” colleges—is all too often about the

pursuit of prestige at almost any cost, a game that perpetuates the big lie that one can't find a decent education at anything less than a Brand Name school.

I was excited to read Jacques Steinberg's new book about elite college admissions, *The Gatekeepers*, anticipating a breath of fresh air on the subject from the *New York Times* education reporter. As he introduces himself and his book, we learn that this son of a Massachusetts anesthesiologist sees himself as a sort of accidental alumnus of the Ivy League, who pleads ignorance as to how he got admitted to Dartmouth in the early 1980s. But he obviously owes a lot to his very assertive mom, a former nurse, who on the family's exploratory visit to the Dartmouth campus grabbed her son by the collar after an admissions officer's spiel and strode to the front of the room to magisterially inform the official, “We're the Steinbergs.” The rest, as they say, is history.

Steinberg strikes me as a lucky man indeed. After joining the *Times* and becoming a national education correspondent, he attended the 1999 conference of the National Association of College Admission Counseling in Orlando, Florida. While there, he was approached by William Hiss, an administrator at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. Hiss wondered whether Steinberg would like exclusive access to the selective college's admissions process, noteworthy in that it does not require applicants to submit SAT or ACT scores. Although Steinberg and his editor, Ethan Bronner, were intrigued by the idea, they declined Hiss's offer in favor of a less “anomalous” college—i.e., one that continued to rely on gatekeeping tests like the SAT.

After being turned down by several colleges for the kind of exclusive, total-access deal the *Times* wanted, Steinberg found what would seem a perfect match. At Wesleyan, located in Middletown, Connecticut, midway between Hartford and New Haven, college officials agreed to provide the reporter unfettered access to its admissions process from fall 1999 to spring 2000, culminating in the *Times's* series of articles upon which *The Gatekeepers* is based. Wesleyan agreed not to meddle in Steinberg's stories, gave him access to individual students and their families and allowed him to observe any and all meetings in its admissions deliberations—in other words, a reporter's dream assignment. (It couldn't have hurt Steinberg's cause that his boss, Bronner, graduated from Wesleyan in 1976, as one discovers in the book's acknowledgments.)

It's all very cozy and well connected in

Peter Sacks (www.petersacks.org) is an author and essayist who writes frequently about education. His latest book is Standardized Minds: The High Price of America's Testing Culture and What We Can Do to Change It (Perseus).

these pages, with lucky people and impressive degrees from prestigious institutions to spare. When we meet Steinberg's featured "gatekeeper," a Wesleyan admissions officer named Ralph Figueroa, a Los Angeles native who ends up in Middletown after a stint working admissions at Occidental College in LA, I'm thinking, cool choice. This ought to be interesting, a Mexican-American man with a working-class background (the rebel in me hopes), now an insider shaking things up at one elite private college in comfy New England.

Instead, we learn that the 34-year-old Figueroa's dad was a lawyer and graduate of Loyola Law School; that his mom earned a master's degree in education, and became a mover and shaker in an organization called Expanded Horizons, a nationally recognized program (held in high regard by Ronald Reagan and his Education Secretary, Terrel Bell) that helped Mexican-American kids prepare for college. The family frequently took their children on trips to colleges like Pomona, Occidental and Caltech. The grooming and preparation paid off for the Figueroa clan. Ralph graduated from Stanford—he turned down Harvard, Yale and Princeton—and went on to UCLA Law. His several siblings also attended elite schools, including UCLA Law and Stanford Law, and one sister, like himself, would find a niche in admissions at Caltech.

As if adopting the same mesmerizing tricks as the colleges themselves, holding out the impossible dream of an elite college education to the masses in order to up their application counts (which improves selectivity rankings), Steinberg and his publisher pitch this book as "required reading for every parent of a high school age child and for every student" who is applying to college. But it's easy to imagine ordinary parents and their kids—the overwhelming majority of whom attend ordinary public high schools that aren't even remotely on the map of "feeder" schools highly regarded by elite colleges—being completely intimidated by this book. I could scarcely find one person in these pages, whether an admissions officer or student, whose parents weren't at least modestly well educated or who didn't have some connection to either a brand-name college or elite prep school. Most of the admissions officers at Wesleyan were either Wesleyan grads or had connections to other elite schools (a fairly common trait, from what I can tell,

among the admissions staffs at elite private colleges). In fact, I was able to find just one student in Steinberg's world whose parents had not attended college, a most admirable young New Yorker named Aggie. But even she managed to find her way out of a down-trodden public school in New York City to the Oldfields School, a venerable girls' prep school in rural Maryland.

But let's be real. Readers of this book will more likely be the well-educated parents and high-flying students who do attend

The admissions process is an elaborate and complicated game in the most literal sense, played by colleges and students alike.

schools that are "on the map," and for whom prestigious colleges and personal connections to those schools are all part of the entitlement package; people for whom "state university" is a dirty word. And though Steinberg is skillful at telling the stories of Ralph and a handful of young people who apply to Wesleyan and other highly ranked colleges, I can easily imagine sophisticated readers sighing a collective, "So what?" There's very little in Steinberg's highly detailed narrative that such readers won't already have surmised about the competitive admissions game.

When highly selective colleges talk about their admissions process to prospective students, they like to convey the notion that there are no formulas, no tricks, no standard combination of grades or test scores that will insure one's admission. It's standard advice that Steinberg, who calls the process "messy," would undoubtedly agree with. True, there may be no magic formulas, but colleges like Wesleyan do pass their judgments about individuals under some mighty formulaic parameters. Readers probably won't be surprised to learn that Wesleyan admissions officials watch their ranking in *US News & World Report* like nuclear plant operators monitoring reactor heat levels. In fact, Steinberg describes one seasoned admissions officer, Greg Pyke, whose task is to keep running tabs on median SAT levels and other indicators of the admitted class important to *US News*, in order to insure that the college improves upon its previous year ranking.

The most revealing aspects of the process can be gleaned between the lines of Steinberg's account. For example, many students and parents who buy into this game have long known that test scores play a very important, if not decisive, role

in it. Recent surveys by the National Association of College Admission Counseling confirm this. According to NACAC's December 2001 survey, fully 86 percent of admissions officials rated test scores as of either considerable or moderate importance, just slightly below the importance the gatekeepers attach to grades in college prep courses (89 percent).

As competition for admission has intensified and acceptance rates have declined at elite private colleges in recent years, the weight attached to gatekeeping tests has also increased, according to a recent report by the Association for Institutional Research. Meanwhile, private colleges have

soured on high school grades, arguably a more egalitarian indicator of merit and once the most important criterion in admissions, this despite the well-known correlation between SAT scores and the educational and income levels of one's parents.

Steinberg, like the admissions officers who are his subjects, is rarely as explicit about these matters as the data presented in those surveys. But parents and kids who know the game won't bat an eye at how heavily colleges rely on gatekeeping tests, their claims to the contrary notwithstanding. For example, Wesleyan admissions officers seem to think that a 50- or 100-point difference in SAT scores among two candidates means something significant about their future academic performance in college, a patently false use of test scores. Steinberg, ever nonjudgmental, allows such assumptions to pass virtually unchallenged, although they have been powerfully refuted in numerous studies. Bates, the SAT-optional college that first approached Steinberg, discovered no differences between the academic performance of Bates students who declined to submit SAT scores when applying, and that of SAT-submitters, whose test scores were, on average, 160 points higher.

Deeply ingrained beliefs in the power of cognitive screens like the SAT and about the importance of good grades in AP courses were not the only things at the top of Wesleyan's gatekeeping criteria. There were two additional ones, earmarked by a manila folder. "If an applicant was the child of an alumna or alumnus, a dark orange square was added," Steinberg writes. "If an applicant had identified him- or herself as a member of a minority group, a yellow circle was added. These details were considered too important for a reader to overlook, and the coding system was de-

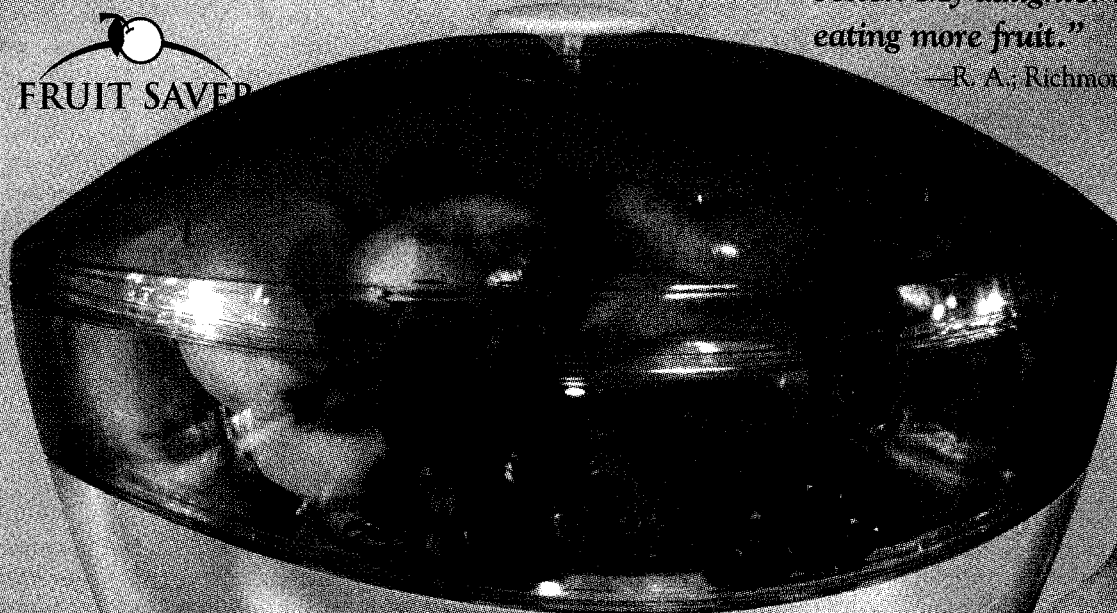
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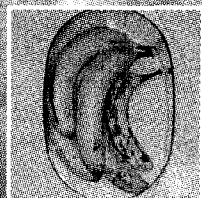
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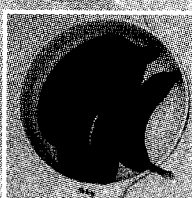
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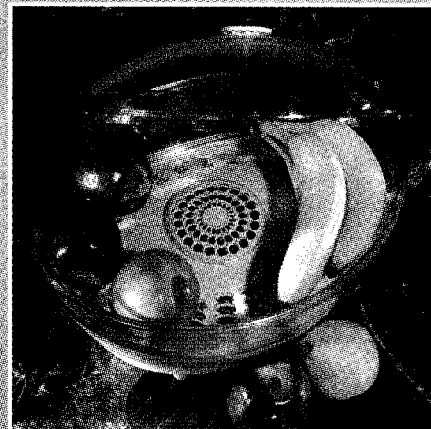


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signed to ensure that they were given due attention."

Within these strictures Wesleyan's gatekeepers exercised a small degree of wiggle room, and Steinberg does his best work describing the difficult process of selecting a class of some 700 students from about 7,000 applications. Grateful, perhaps, for the access Wesleyan gave him, he writes admiringly of the gatekeepers' studious commitment to be fair and objective. But parents with high-school-age children are likely to be appalled at the inconsistencies, and even arbitrary nature, of some of the judgments made by Figueroa and his colleagues. The SAT, for instance, which is often described by admissions officials, the College Board and the Educational Testing Service as a "common yardstick," looks more like a magic stick out of *Alice in Wonderland*, meaning whatever Wesleyan's gatekeepers want it to mean, depending on whether the applicant is a member of a minority group, an athlete or a member of the Wesleyan "family." Isn't meritocracy grand?

Meanwhile, Andrew Fairbanks, a former Wesleyan admissions official, has given us a very different account of elite college admissions, in a book written with Christopher Avery and Richard Zeckhauser, both professors at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. While Steinberg uses character and narrative to reveal the inner workings of one college's admissions process, the authors of *The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite* seek to expose this often-deceitful and manipulated game in order to make it more fair to all comers. Indeed, they say they hope to arm more students and parents with information on how the game is played, and therefore help to reduce the unfair advantages the present system affords well-connected and affluent students. Although the book is focused on a detailed investigation of early admissions programs, its reach is far broader, if only because early admissions has become such a key element of competitive college-recruitment efforts in recent years. As one student who was recently admitted to Harvard told the authors, "That's just how you apply to Harvard."

Although the writing lacks the journalistic polish of Steinberg's account, and although the organization is at times disjointed, readers seeking solid information about elite college admissions will find *The Early Admissions Game* refreshingly frank. Other readers concerned about restoring some equity to the process will

also appreciate the book's generosity of spirit and suggestions for reform.

The authors present a devastating portrait of elite college admissions—and early admissions in particular—as an elaborate and complicated "game" in the most literal meaning of that word, played by colleges seeking competitive advantages over rivals, students seeking to maximize their opportunities for entry into prestigious colleges and school counselors striving to maintain the reputations of their "feeder" schools in terms of their efficiency in placing students at highly ranked colleges. As in all competitive games, the various players often have little incentive to be forthcoming about their tactics and every incentive to conceal strategic information from public view. Not surprisingly, the authors suggest, the winners of the game tend to be privileged students who have access to highly skilled counselors with information pipelines to elite college admissions offices.

At the center of the book is a social scientific investigation that makes powerful analytical use of admissions data at elite colleges spanning several years and including some 500,000 college applications, which reveals a fascinating statistical portrait of early admissions. (Early admissions programs include both "early decision" ones, which permit just one early application and bind students to that college if they are admitted, and "early action" programs, which allow multiple applications and do not bind students to colleges that accept them early.) In public, most institutions are quick to reassure students and parents that there's no advantage to applying early as opposed to waiting to throw one's hat into the "regular" admissions pool. But the advantages afforded early applications are considerable.

Consider Princeton. One need only note the increasingly small number of openings remaining from the regular admissions pool to see why many students who don't walk on water might find it in their best interest to apply early. Of the 2,000 students admitted in one recent year at Princeton, for instance, only 500 had applied during the regular admissions cycle. The rest were either early applicants or "hooked" applicants (underrepresented minorities, athletes or children of alumni).

At Princeton, which runs an early decision program, the authors estimate that while its acceptance rate from the regular applicant pool was slightly below 20 percent, the college's acceptance rate for early applicants ballooned to well over 50 percent. The same pattern held for virtually all

the highly selective colleges in the authors' study. At Columbia, for example, more than seven in ten students who applied early were admitted, compared with about three in ten students applying during the regular period.

When colleges concede such glaring differences in their admissions rates, they explain that early applicants tend to be more attractive candidates in terms of test scores, grades and other factors. The authors easily destroy this canard by comparing early and regular admission rates for students with similar credentials. Applying early to elite colleges, they demonstrate, produces the equivalent of a 100-point SAT boost for early action applicants and a 190-point boost for early decision applicants. For the time-strapped student odds-maker, the game presents some interesting choices. Spend \$1,000 on an SAT prep course, or apply early? "Which is easier?" the authors ask. "To submit an early application? Or to master the trombone to the level of all-state orchestra or become a semifinalist in the Westinghouse Science Competition?"

So what's in it for the colleges? Why give early decision applicants the equivalent of nearly 200 points on the SAT? Part of the answer, it seems, is that they have an Enron problem. The unfortunate fact of elite college admissions in the era of *US News & World Report* is that the magazine's annual ranking of the nation's best colleges now rules this marketplace with an iron fist. The magazine operates under the fiction that college quality is tantamount to median SAT scores, acceptance rates and other more arcane measures such as "yield" rates, defined as the percentage of the admitted students who decide to enroll—which might be more accurately dubbed the "prestige index." In any case, colleges have discovered how early admission programs easily permit them to manipulate numbers in order to elevate, however marginally, their *US News* rankings. For example, an early decision applicant will almost certainly enroll, thus instantly boosting the college's yield rate.

Who takes most advantage of early admissions and its generous payoffs? Primarily children from affluent families, students for whom a college's financial aid offer isn't a deal breaker. Because early decision programs in particular lock needy students into a single college, they are unable to compare or negotiate financial aid packages among schools. The authors contend that colleges also exploit the monopoly power granted through early

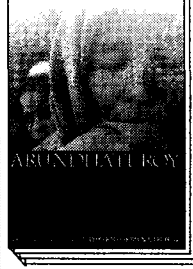
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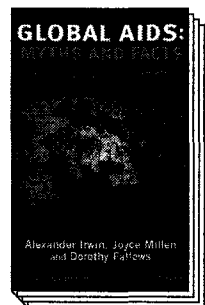
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decision programs in order to hold down their financial aid budgets. Furthermore, students with access to good information about early admission programs, including their improved chances of admission, also gain. And, again, such students tend to be affluent. Reliable information, the authors found, is a function of whether students attend public high schools where many students do not go to college or elite private schools and highly regarded public schools where most students do attend college.

Among the most compelling passages in *The Early Admissions Game* is its description of the elaborate, back-channel "slotting" operations by which highly skilled and well-connected high school counselors work hand in hand with elite college admissions officers to place students. To outsiders, such collaboration might be scandalous, but for some students recently accepted to places like Harvard and Yale whom the authors interviewed, it's rather ho-hum. Listen to Mira (Harvard '98): "My counselor has a good relationship with the Harvard admissions office. He handpicks people for admission and tells Harvard who to admit." Or Dan (Yale '98): "If I wanted to attend Yale, [the counselor] would get me in."

No book could paint such a damning portrait without offering suggestions for reform of a system that produces such inequitable results. The authors discuss various options, including the frequently suggested proposal that colleges agree to a ban on early admission programs. That's not likely to fly, the authors argue, because any given college would have great incentive to violate the ban by picking off its competitors' most promising applicants. "If we gave it up," Harvard admissions dean William Fitzsimmons suggested, "other institutions inside and outside the Ivy League would carve up our class and our faculty would carve us up."

As an alternative to the current system, the authors propose to set up an independent, Internet-operated clearinghouse, through which students could state their first preference for college without a binding commitment. The clearinghouse would share the information among all participating colleges in order to preclude any deception. Colleges, which currently spend a great deal of money on statistical models trying to predict which students will ultimately enroll, could rely instead on the students' stated preferences. Such a simple, relatively inexpensive solution would also diminish the importance of the sorts of back-channel slotting operations that

now give privileged applicants such an advantage in the early admissions game.

Meanwhile, however, there's little reason to hope the game will become more equitable anytime soon. Elite colleges appear eager to install early admissions programs as fixtures for building and managing their entering classes. As of December, for example, the University of Pennsylvania had already filled nearly half its freshman class with early admits. At Yale and Columbia, more than 40 percent of entering classes was already spoken for. Millions more high school students from increasingly well-

educated families will continue to place their hopes and dreams on a tiny fraction of colleges that admit an increasingly smaller percentage of those who apply. At Harvard, for example, the acceptance rate of 11 percent in the year 2000 was nearly half what it was in 1990. By midyear, testing companies had reported surges in registrations for taking entrance exams, with ACT Inc. boasting its biggest gain in thirty-five years.

All this in a nation where nearly 40 percent of adults believe they currently are, or will be, among the richest 1 percent of Americans. Who knows, maybe we'll all get lucky. ■

FILMS

Reel Men

STUART KLAWANS

ANGER MANAGEMENT • A MIGHTY WIND

The film begins with a federal marshal intoning "This is a very difficult time for our country" and ends with the singing of the national anthem, performed before Rudy Giuliani himself. Between these moments comes a journey of emotional healing, undertaken by an average American Joe (or Dave, actually) who

can rightly describe himself as "a pretty nice guy." Too nice, perhaps. Although this quiet hero lives underneath an Army recruitment billboard, Dave has grown used to letting others push him around. He can—he must—learn to stand up for himself. So must we all.

I affirm that the preceding paragraph is entirely descriptive and contains no interpretation, except for that "So must we all" part, which is hard to avoid. Such is the message delivered to a troubled America by *Anger Management*, the movie in which Adam Sandler shows the way toward national renewal by getting angry, and also really *feeling* his lust for Jack Nicholson. I recommend it to everyone.

Now, I know there are skeptics among you. Some dismiss all Hollywood movies as commercial products, incapable by nature of rising to the level of art. (When art lovers want to watch moving images these days, they turn to Matthew Barney's *Cre-master* cycle. Barney has taken to embedding DVDs of his films into limited-edition sculptures, which then sell for the price of a nice vacation home.) Others admit that Hollywood movies may occasionally become artlike; but since the

medium is collaborative and famously prone to compromise, there are people who doubt that an Adam Sandler comedy can mean anything, except in the haphazard, semiconscious way that calls for ideological decoding. That *Anger Management* might develop a coherent argument, point by point—that it might *think*—is itself unthinkable.

So let's put *Anger Management* to the test. Granted, it is twice over a genre picture: a buddy movie (meant to combine the audiences of two stars) and an Adam Sandler vehicle (which operates by its own now-familiar rules). If this were fast food, it would come with fries. But then, maybe we're the ones who shouldn't be too fast.

The story casts Sandler as a 35-year-old corporate drone who abruptly finds himself enmeshed in a legal proceeding fit for Josef K. Presumed guilty from the start—and of what, exactly?—he is remanded to the custody of one Dr. Buddy Rydell (Nicholson), a therapist who specializes in treating the criminally enraged. This sentence seems not so much unjust as inexplicable, since it's handed down to a man whose bland, blinking face is an apology made flesh, whose tenor voice barely has

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the strength to force itself through his nose. I might carelessly laugh at the judge's decision and pass on; but I prefer to factor its incongruity into the first proposition the movie sets forth, a proposition that again recalls Kafka: It is absurd to treat a punishment as a cure, or a cure as punishment.

The movie arrives at the next stage in its argument approximately one reel later, when Nicholson moves in with Sandler, the better to perform "full contact" therapy (or punishment). This is the moment when Nicholson strips away his tweedy, professorial disguise to don a black beret and shades, so that he may revert to his image as a cinematic lord of misrule. The proposition here, I suppose, is that the person given power over you to punish or cure might turn out to be a fraud or madman. Sandler reasonably fears this possibility, which the audience, too, is led to entertain, given the predatory looks that Nicholson keeps stealing at his charge—predatory in a lounge-lizard way, I mean. No sooner has Nicholson settled into the apartment than he's bedding down naked with Sandler, demanding to see his penis, forcing him to sing about being gay and taking him cruising for transvestite hookers. Third proposition: The fraud or madman given power over you wants immediate access to your body. Or maybe he won't be satisfied until you want access to his.

By the way, did I mention that Sandler fears sudden, unprovoked assaults below the waist, perpetrated by other men? That's why he's always scanning the perimeter for danger, in a shlemiel's version of post-September 11 anxiety; and that's why it's interesting that this alertness to criminal threats (at a very difficult time for our country) should temporarily be resolved into a psychological problem, through the force of Nicholson's assaults.

Let's say there's a rupture of personal boundaries. (As description, this is a fair minimum.) Such interpenetration is evidently needed before Sandler can question himself seriously, so that he may wonder, for the first time, whether he does need help. Self-questioning is also needed to make criminal guilt go away. Once Sandler begins to yield, Nicholson willingly announces his patient's innocence, in a speech that may be insincere but makes an impressive racket. Through a form of sexual submission, Sandler has changed himself from a potential terrorist (a ticking bomb, as they say) into a loyal American, which in this context means being a nut-case pure and simple.

But as I said, "pure and simple" is only temporary. Like a bright teenager who's

just picked up some Freudian jargon, the movie goes through a phase of explaining everything psychologically and then, fortunately, moves on. I think it would have been unsatisfyingly simple just to say that wars are made by homophobes who obsess over basket size; and the screenwriter of *Anger Management*, David Dorfman, apparently agrees with me, since he complicates the argument during a third act that sometimes plays shakily but is always worth thinking about. To complete its train of reasoning, *Anger Management* reintroduces the motif of crime, forces Sandler to act in a civic arena and demands that his problems be solved not through private candor but by public speech.

Without giving away too many of the jokes, I can say that this conclusion involves a significant relaxation of official vigilance against surprise attacks, accompanied by an assertion of the ties of community; and by a stroke of cinematic integrity, both these actions are conveyed through a well-known convention of the Adam Sandler movie, the celebrity cameo appearance. As the famous faces pass by, you're left with the impression that everyone in New York City, Dave excepted, had already known Dr. Buddy Rydell. Now Dave, too, is at home in the big group, which functions (to Kafka's astonishment) as a kind of benevolent conspiracy.

Q.E.D. I need add nothing more than that I laughed out loud about thirty times, or approximately once every three minutes, with background smiles and chuckles left unlocked. Peter Segal directed, efficiently for the most part, with an obvious determination to put Sandler and Nicholson together in the frame as often as possible (not a foregone conclusion, in today's buddy pictures). The fine supporting cast is headed by the ever-welcome Marisa Tomei as Dave's long-suffering girlfriend.

Did I mention he has a girlfriend? Did I say he's accused of being a chronic woman-beater? It occurs to me that my point-by-point reading of *Anger Management* is coherent but incomplete. So go—fill in the blanks.

Christopher Guest's comedies are pretty much free of celebrity cameos, but they, too, seem like community affairs, since they're made with an ever-widening circle of friends. A core group that includes Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, Bob Balaban, Fred Willard, Parker Posey and Larry Miller worked with Guest in *Waiting for Guffman* and *Best in Show*, two mock documentaries about low-grade forms of show business. Now these per-

formers, joined by about a dozen other lunatics, are helping Guest make not-quite-loving fun of yet another orphan genre of the entertainment business: folk music.

As an object of satire, this would seem to be as unnecessary as it gets. Searching for some reason for the existence of *A Mighty Wind*—a title to bring out the sixth-grader in all of us—you might imagine that Guest wants to laugh at those paunchy, graying people who still look back, with earnest nostalgia, on their acoustic-strum youth.

I'm talking to you, hypocrite *Nation* reader—my lookalike! My brother!

But then, what Guest has always liked best in his characters is their unstoppable, otherworldly belief in themselves, or rather in an image that no setback or indignity can shatter. With grinning amazement at such optimism, Guest now presents the ultimate show of the self-deluded: a reunion concert in New York City featuring three folk-music acts of the 1960s. They are The New Main Street Singers (a sweater-wearing "neufet" featuring John Michael Higgins, Jane Lynch and Parker Posey); the love-bird duo of Mitch & Mickey (Eugene Levy and Catherine O'Hara); and the less-than-stellar Folksmen (Guest, Michael McKean and Harry Shearer—the same guys who were Spinal Tap, now playing identical roles relative to one another but performing ditties about the Spanish Civil War, or a train wreck in a coal mine).

All three acts are delectable, as are the showbiz oddities who gather around them; but the most engaging of all are Mitch & Mickey. In a departure from the previous movies, which featured balanced ensembles, Guest has made this duo the focus of *A Mighty Wind*. The disadvantage is unevenness; sometimes the film sags, when it turns to characters who aren't fully developed. The benefits are two performances of contrasting, demented intensity from O'Hara and Levy. As Mickey, O'Hara seems to vibrate slightly from keeping in check her rage against Mitch. After decades of separation, he remains to her the most powerful figure in the world. To the audience, he's a guy who shuffles through the movie in a daze, popping his eyes at the phantoms that hover before his face and swallowing his words like spoonful of codeine-laced cough syrup, never quite understanding what Mickey's so upset about.

You should know that the climactic concert, sung and played by the actors themselves, was recorded as a live performance. A wonderful decision. It gives you all the fun of participating, without the embarrassment of actually being there. ■

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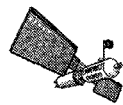
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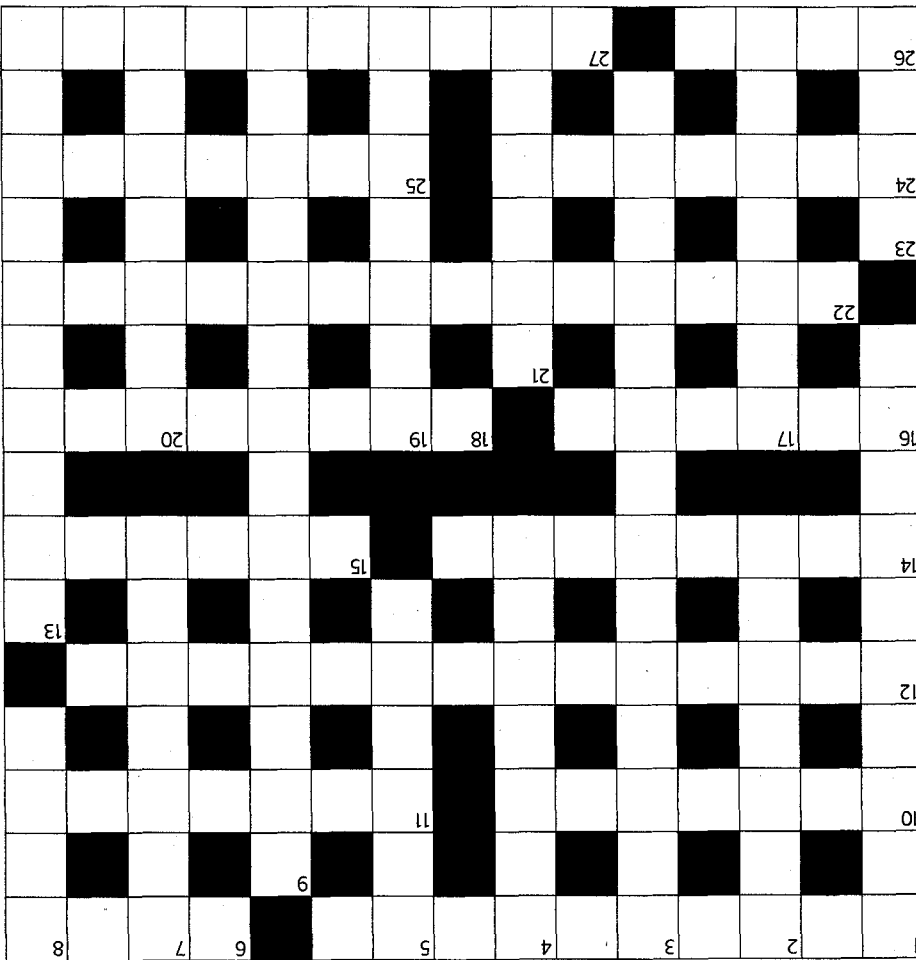
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PUZZLE NO. 2891

FRANK W. LEWIS

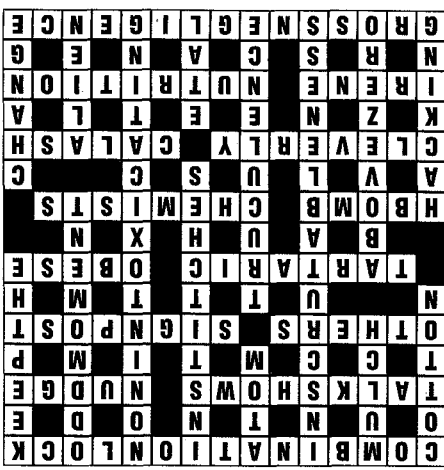


ACROSS

- 1 and 6 It's one way to take care of a person, but the best way might be to take some bicarbonate of soda. (6,4,4)
- 10 Lock-keeper, perhaps. (7)
- 11 There's nothing in the duty roll like one who insists on crowing about things! (7)
- 12 What one takes on foot has nothing but sound reasoning to an associate, in a rather morbid way. (14)
- 14 Part of the British Peerage is concerned about a high decoration in their country, being connected to the hearing apparatus. (8)
- 15 Little Brother is about to sit rather uncomfortably in the "watering hole" for some. (6)
- 16 Clasp one who hangs on to things. (6)
- 18 This painter certainly should have made himself heard! (8)
- 22 A traditional sign of spring to the poet. (3,5,6)
- 24 Nothing that gets up wrong gets given to a person for a while, which is rich....! (7)
- 25 ...and nothing so long and twisted as those that may make a 4 o'clock appearance. (7)
- 26 The subtitle of *Pindore* was a slave to it. (4)
- 27 They should take care of small nuisances, although the wrong step is taken here in Paris, from where it ends! (10)

DOWN

- 1 Although chirps keep coming from it, it's not a bird dog—just one from Belgium. (10)
- 2 A dancer like this may 21 a bit, but you wouldn't want the deadly type to hit you. (7)
- 3 What you have with dirty shoes shows what a cat is supposed to be able to do. (4,2,4,4)
- 4 Where in Paris a sort of comet is the result. (7)
- 5 Not a covering of hair for the listener—but an insect might be found here. (6)
- 6 It's one way to take care of a person, but the best way might be to take some bicarbonate of soda. (6,4,4)
- 10 Lock-keeper, perhaps. (7)
- 11 There's nothing in the duty roll like one who insists on crowing about things! (7)
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SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2890

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